

# Lola Nomdedeu, Clara Beltrán and Uberto Stabile: ‘La imprenta era una plaza’.

## On Marginal Press in Post-Franco Spain

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On 30 November 2024, we organised a public meeting entitled ‘La imprenta era una plaza’ [The printing press was a public square] as part of the EDITA international festival programme for independent publishers.<sup>1</sup> This festival was held every spring from 1994 to 2025 in Punta Umbría, a coastal town in the Andalusian province of Huelva, with some ‘nomad’ editions that were relocated to other dates and cities in Spain. This was the case with the Valencia edition, which took place two weeks after the great floods caused by a violent cold drop, and which devastated towns and lives during the first half of November. The conversation included references to this catastrophe, which revealed the inaction of the public authorities, as well as the responsiveness and self-organisation of civil society.

Throughout its thirty-one year history, the EDITA festival has been led and organised by Uberto Stabile, one of the participants in the conversation I am transcribing here. Stabile is actively committed not only to preserving the memory of the self-managed publishing initiatives that emerged after the Franco dictatorship, but also to the practices and forms of socialisation conveyed by them, as evidenced by the call for this historic festival. Today, he directs the Rafael Alberti Foundation (Puerto de Santa María, Cádiz), which safeguards the work of this poet, a member of the Generation of ‘27, and a militant of the Spanish Communist Party exiled during the dictatorship. He is also preparing a new publishing festival in the municipality of Casas Viejas, famous for being the scene of an anarchist popular uprising against the government of the Second Spanish Republic (1933).

<sup>1</sup> Inés Molina et al., ‘La imprenta era una plaza: *offset*, autoedición y creación en Valencia’, public conversation, EDITA Nómada Valencia, Sporting Club Russafa, 30 November 2024, <https://au-agenda.com/evento/edita-nomada-2024/2024-11-29/>.

Below is an English transcript of the conversation we had that day, originally held in Spanish and Valencian with the intention of celebrating the linguistic and territorial diversity of the Iberian Peninsula, which was denied during the dictatorship [Fig. 1].

**Inés Molina:** The idea behind this meeting is to facilitate a conversation about the experience of OCMO, the printing press founded in Valencia in 1977 by Octavi Monsonís and Lola Nomdedeu, which takes its name from Octavi's own personal acronym. To this end, we are joined by Lola, as well as by Uberto Stabile and Clara Beltrán, who printed their own magazines there at the time, to discuss this vibrant, self-managed, grassroots publishing scene that emerged on the streets after Franco's death in November 1975. Clara and Uberto forged a close relationship with OCMO through Bananas, a free creation collective they founded when they were barely 18 years old. Through this collective, they published a series of magazines and pamphlets where they experimented with words and images, allowing them to get in touch with other young people who shared their artistic interests.

I came across Lola, Uberto, and Clara through research I began in 2018 on the marginal press published in the post-Franco era (1976-1980). 'Marginal press' was one of the names given at the time to the informal, self-published publications that proliferated throughout the country after the dictatorship. When I started this work, I was struck by how, after Franco's death, a kind of grassroots cultural explosion occurred in different and distant places, and how this phenomenon was channeled or shared through rebellious publishing practices. People poured their creativity and political and cultural concerns into the punk zines of the 1980s and their precursors in the marginal press, while projecting the society they desired after the dictatorship.

This research led me to visit Uberto Stabile's personal archive in November 2024, now preserved at the University of Huelva. There, Uberto has deposited all kinds of countercultural and experimental publications that he began collecting in the late 1970s, when he embarked on his publishing adventures with the Bananas collective. Uberto and I met in the faculty cafeteria, and it was there that he first told me about Lola and her printing press, OCMO, referring to it as a hub of social, political, and cultural activity in Valencia at that time. A few months later, through Uberto, Lola and I got in touch and had long telephone conversations. She also shared with me by email a series of photographs from her personal archive that I would like to show here today, as they reflect very well the spirit of OCMO, which was a *plaza* [square], as indicated by the title of our conversation. The printing press was a square insofar this establishment was a very important point of meeting and debate for the social movements of Valencia's maritime neighbourhoods.<sup>2</sup>



**Fig. 1** Still from the public conversation 'La imprenta era una plaza' [The printing press was a public square], held at EDITA Nómada, Sporting Club Russafa, 30 November 2024.

<sup>2</sup> A detailed study on the trajectory of the free creation collective Bananas and its intersection with OCMO can be found in Molina 2025.

I prepared a few brief questions or talking points to stimulate conversation, although I am sure you will be able to continue perfectly well without me. In any case, if anyone here, whether it be Octavi or anyone else who wrote, drew, or published marginal publications in those years, would like to contribute, please do not hesitate to do so, because this is an open space.

That said, Lola, please tell us a little bit about how it all began.

**Lola Nomdedeu:** OCMO was created to be the printing press for an anti-Franco political group that operated clandestinely, the Organització d'Esquerra Comunista (OEC),<sup>3</sup> but which was also open to the public in order to finance its infrastructure. At that time, both Octavi and I were members of this organisation, founded in 1974 as a union integrated into the Workers' Platforms of Valencia, later acquiring a more partisan form. This latter decision led us to abandon our militancy, but we maintained the political and cultural vocation of the printing press. Despite being open to the general public, the printing press was never intended to be a for-profit business, which meant that we had structural financial difficulties that always threatened its continuity.

At the end of the dictatorship, there were political parties of all ideologies and symbols that disseminated their programmes through clandestine publications, murals, or spontaneous posters that appeared on the streets. After Franco's death, however, all this political ferment was transformed. They tried to articulate a slightly more functional, cleaner, and more structured public presence, and public figures began to appear, people who 'put their faces' to these organisations and spread their messages. However, this was not meant solely for those drawn by power. For the first time, political participation was not something closed or clandestine, and so people who had no direct links to organisations or parties began to come forward.

**Clara Beltrán:** This was the case with my mother, Enriqueta Fontbuena, and with Sol Romeu, mother of Fernando Garcín (a member of the Bananas collective), who were in a highly politicised neighbourhood association.

**LN:** The participation of local schools was also very important. As was that of people like Professor José María Izquierdo. At OCMO, you could bump into Izquierdo any day, preparing a magazine, or a 'fascist' lady, and then a group of people who had come from the surrounding villages... all of them putting together their own publications.

**IM:** How did OCMO work?

<sup>3</sup> Communist Left Organisation.

**Uberto Stabile:** OCMO was really a portal, a place where people with concerns and a desire to do something could meet (something that perhaps became more apparent with the floods and the popular response they generated). In the late 1970s, we would meet and do things from anywhere. The important thing was to get together and debate. I would say that this was the most important thing about OCMO: it was a meeting place where people exchanged ideas and took action. Above all, civil society, because although there were political parties that printed their propaganda, they were always extra-parliamentary organisations. Everything that was outside the state organisational chart of the democratic transition was discussed there. OCMO was the great portal that gave an 'outlet' to all of that.

**LN:** Yes, indeed, there were many people who came just to chat. Many people went there not to make copies, but simply to chat, to leave a message, or just hang out.

**CB:** Yes. You also have to bear in mind that social dynamics were very different back then. We would meet at neighbourhood associations, at kiosks, squares... We had a support network that was very physical, very face-to-face. Nothing like today's virtual world. It was so physical that you had to go to the places themselves.

**LN:** There were also many chains of solidarity and favours. For example, when a town sent us some work, I would deliver it on the bus so that it would reach them, and they would pay us later by money order. But all of that meant a somewhat complicated way of life. We never made ends meet. I remember Uberto chasing after a client who had a good salary and didn't want to pay us.

There were things like that, but it was also very rewarding to be able to give voice to so many initiatives like the ones we had back then. Things had to be done, and they had to be done right away. We had endured this stoically for too long. At OCMO, we really pulled out all stops. Materials for children, for young people, for doctors. We did things about family, about grief. We also did things for public institutions. We printed everything for the university, from papers for an engineering conference to notes for a philosophy course.

**US:** As for cultural magazines, which is what brings us together here today, I would say that in Valencia practically 80% of literary magazines were produced at OCMO. If I remember correctly, apart from *Bananas*, there were *Quervo* notebooks, *Septim-omiau*, *Aurora*, *Malvarrosa*, *La pipa de Kif*, *La forest d'Arana* and *Fuertearnera*. There were thousands. And the vast majority of them are preserved in my archive in Huelva.

**CB:** It's funny because, in a way, the fringe was bigger than the mainstream.

**Fig. 2** Lola smoking in OCMO. Photograph by José García Poveda 'El Flaco', 1977. Personal archive of Lola Nomdedeu.



**US:** That's right. Back then, we felt the need and urgency to make zines. And the funny thing is that we didn't even know what they were. We called them magazines. We wanted to publish magazines that reflected our concerns, our dreams, our delusions. We wanted to make them public. We had lived through a long night, and finally, the sky was clearing.

I remember, for example, our magazine *Obra abierta*, about cinema and literature. We had dedicated an issue to Pier Paolo Pasolini in February 1981, and we were going straight to the printers. We designed the magazine, and then we went to OCMO to reduce costs in collaboration with them. There it was laid out, bound, and printed. We did everything ourselves. We even learned how to cut. Then we stored the magazines at Clara's house, and on one of those trips, carrying the pages of the magazine about Pasolini, we were caught up in the coup of February 23.<sup>4</sup> I remember Lola picking everything up, telling me that it was over.

**LN:** When 23F happened, we had to get rid of everything: the publications, the plates... We were quite scared.

**CB:** Lola started saying: let's burn everything, we have to burn everything!

**IM:** Lola, could you comment on these photos from your archive?

**LN:** Of course. In the first photograph, you can see the typewriter we had at the printing press, where many things were written [Fig. 2]. It is in our first premises,

<sup>4</sup> The coup d'état of 1981, also known by the numeronym 23F, was a failed attempt at a coup d'état perpetrated on Monday, 23 February 1981 by a group of military commanders in Spain. The main events took place in the cities of Valencia and Madrid.



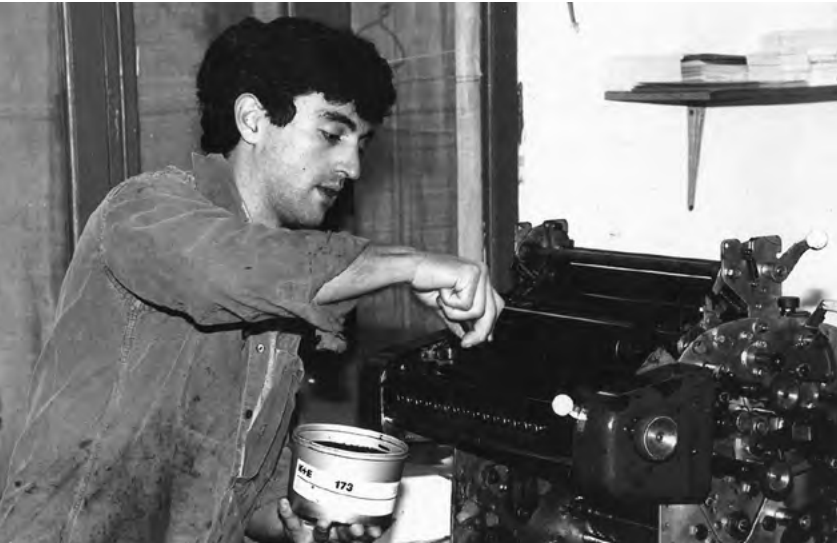
**Fig. 3** At the second OCMO premises, from right to left: Rafael, Lola Nomdedeu, and five friends. Anonymous photographs, 1979. Personal archive of Lola Nomdedeu.

on Calle Actor Llorens. At OCMO, we didn't have our own letterpress machines to prepare the layouts for our publications. At first we used a very rudimentary typewriter, the Minerva, which was common in the anti-Franco circles; and later this IBM Selectric, which we called the 'ball machine' [*màquina de bolita*] and which produced better quality results. A friend that worked at the IBM factory sold it to us for a good price.

In the second photo, you can see six of the people who worked at OCMO: myself, Elena, a friend who was in charge of the photography lab, my brother Rafael, and two students from the Polytechnic University [Fig. 3]. We all learned how to run the printing press on the fly, through trial and error, because none of us had any formal training in this field.

**CB:** Now that you mention it, I think the fact that we did most of the editing process at OCMO, that we knew the entire editorial process firsthand, was very important. In a way, that's what allows for real freedom, because you don't just know the final product, but the entire process that led to it. I remember that Uberto made a layout table with a jigsaw. He made it himself by cutting the wood.

**US:** Sure, we copied the transparency table we saw at OCMO, which we couldn't use because it belonged to the printing press. So as not to bother them, I built a smaller box to do our own work. We learned a lot; it really was a learning process. We learned how to lay out the pages, how to put the graph paper underneath, the margins... it was very enlightening. We learned a lot about what we were capable of doing.



**Fig. 4a, 4b** Rafael Nomdedeu operating the printing press in the different OCMO's premises. Photographs by José García Poveda 'El Flaco', 1977–1979. Personal archive of Lola Nomdedeu.

**LN:** It was really interesting. It was a transformative experience.

**IM:** And what about these photographs showing your brother operating different machines?

**LN:** The first one is from our first premises, located in an old house, with our first offset machine, which was very small. Later we got a bigger one, and we realised that to make it work we needed a three-phase electrical installation, which was not available in the basement where we were, so around 1979 we moved to commercial premises on Calle de Salvador Pau, also in the Maritime District, five minutes from the previous one. In the photos, my brother Rafael is seen handling the ink for the offset machines. On the left is the smaller, more rudimentary printing press they had in the first premises; on the right is the machine purchased for the second headquarters on Calle Salvador Pau [Fig. 4a, 4b].

**IM:** Clara and Uberto, I've also brought some photos of *Bananas. Revista de libre creación* [Bananas. Free creation magazine], the periodical you published in 1979 with your collective of the same name.

**US:** I see that they are from the first and second issues. We bound the first issue with two types of cardboard, one yellow and one purple [Fig. 5a]. And here you can also see all the people who participated, like a game in which we laughed at ourselves. This was written by Fernando, who was in love with Guillermo Brown

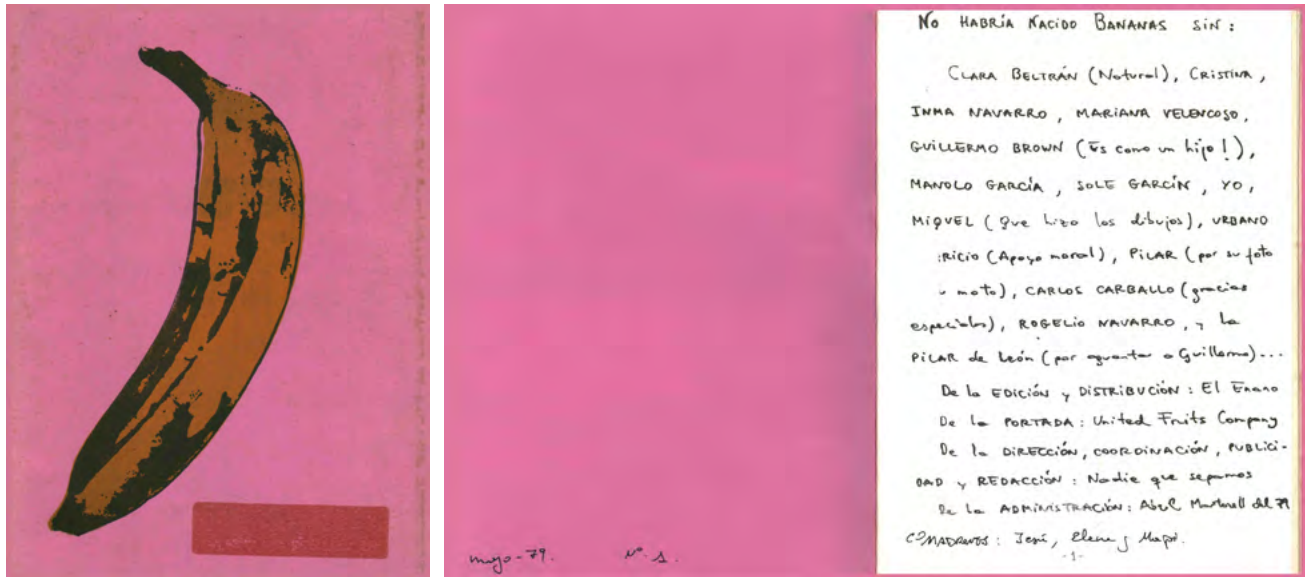


Fig. 5a, 5b Cover and editorial of *Bananas. Revista de libre creación* [Bananas. Free Creation Magazine] no. 1, May 1979. Uberto Stabile Papers, University of Huelva.

[Fig. 5b]. The typography for the second issue was designed by José Ramón Medina, a friend of Filipino origin. Paco Zulueta, who was a jazz musician and university professor, wrote for it. He was also an illustrator [Fig. 6a, 6b].

**CB:** It was fun because we mixed recipes, movies, photography... It was very fresh and chaotic. And I really liked that there were only four or five of us. If you look at the sequence over issues, you can see that we improved as we went along. It was improvised. We also started using colour. We didn't really know what we were doing, it was pure intuition and seeing what happened.

**US:** We were learning and improving through intuition and exchange.

**IM:** And why did it end, Lola? Why did you leave OCMO?

**LN:** Essentially for economic reasons. It wasn't sustainable in the long term. We got tired of it. We were working longer and longer hours but the money never came. What's more, the society we were talking about had ceased to exist. Either you rethought the whole business and started to make a profit, or you had nothing. The way we worked changed, the way we did things. We continued with our 'underground' clientele, these countercultural kids, the neighbours... But it wasn't sustainable, and the relationship no longer existed.

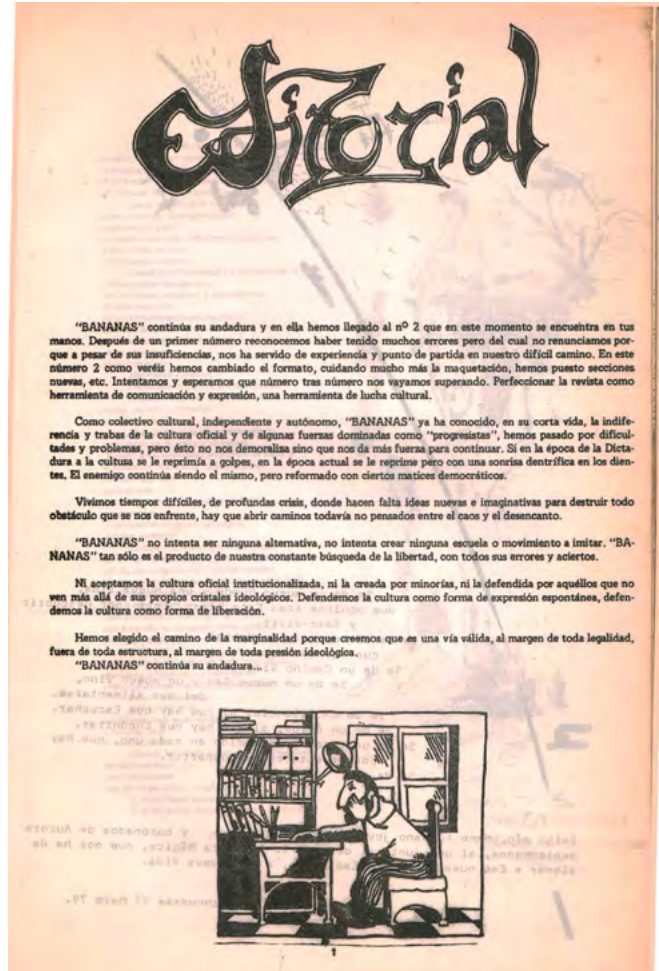


Fig. 6a, 6b Cover, and editorial of *Bananas. Revista de libre creación* no. 2, July 1979. Uberto Stabile Papers, University of Huelva.

IM: Can we finish by talking about the marginal press?

US: Of course. And I want to say that it wasn't so marginal. It was massive, it was everywhere. There were many initiatives everywhere. Little by little, the state that was beginning to form after the dictatorship, that political apparatus of favours and perks, absorbed these initiatives. We mustn't forget that when Franco died, the cultural transformation in this country was not a state policy, it was mainly pressure from citizen movements. It didn't happen in town halls, it happened in bars, in neighbourhood associations, and in the streets. It happened in all kinds of spaces where society organised and acted.

Today it seems that we depend on the state for everything. If the state doesn't provide it, we don't do anything. But at that time, since the state's cultural appa-

ratus didn't exist or was explicitly 'an enemy', we didn't expect it. We didn't rely on any kind of help, nor did we expect to receive it. We never asked for help because we knew they wouldn't give it to us, and we would do what we wanted to do anyway. We didn't depend on anyone, and with the little we had, we got things done. And I think that back then, we all worked a little bit like that: I have it, I do it. Sometimes you have to put dreams above money.

I would like to make one final general comment about power and the state, a situation that has worsened in this country since 1975. Neighbourhood associations have been disappearing, losing social power, and the state has absorbed this entire way of functioning. It has even capitalised on people's precariousness and poverty, causing society to lose power and, in part, its initiative.

**LN:** Of course, when you break the social and associative fabric that provides a safety net against exclusion, resistance also disappears, as does people's ability to respond on their own terms and with their own tools. If people can't organise, they can't speak out, and if they don't speak out, things don't change.

## References

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