

Introduction

A Slight, Yet Charged Gesture: Publishing in Post-Dictatorship

¹ This project was carried out within the framework of the R&D Projects ‘Three times rebels. Networks, strategies, and female agencies in the artistic field during the Franco regime’ (PID2023-148557NB-I00) and ‘ESCON. Writings in contact. Intermedia writing networks in the era of analogue globalization (1961-1991)’ (PID2024-159610NB-I00), a Public Grant for the Creation, Research, and Production of Artistic Projects in Residence (Ministry of Culture-Tabacalera Art Center, and La Casa Invisible, Málaga, 2025-2026), and the Ramón y Cajal contract RYC2024-048825-I, funded by MICIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and ESF+. We would like to thank all the contributors to this issue for their commitment and generosity; the reviewers for their careful reading and suggestions; the editor in chief of *Revista de História da Arte*, Petra Šarin, for her insightful advice and constant help throughout all the process; the language editors Dominic Zugai and Inês Rebelo; and the designer Rita Lynce. And finally, to all the archive owners and archivists who have greatly facilitated the necessary arrangements to include the images in this issue.

This special issue explores experimental, alternative, and underground publishing in contexts of post-dictatorship since the 1970s, from a transnational and diachronic perspective.¹ As both a historical and political concept, ‘post-dictatorship’ is framed here as a period following the suspension of an authoritarian political and social order, marked by a significant cultural openness and effervescence. We consider post-authoritarian contexts in a broad sense, as those undergoing a rupture from conditions in which civil, political, and existential freedoms are censored. Within these specific coordinates, publishing emerges as a key medium for the expression of this newfound creativity, thanks to its accessibility and ease of circulation, which require minimal technical infrastructure or financial resources.

In the wake of regime change, societies undergo not only a redefinition of social and political structures, but also what has been described as a ‘cognitive shock’, one that often unveils a period of great political and cultural experimentation (Kornetis, Kotsovili, and Papadogiannis 2016: 13-26; Scott 1990: 291-312; Kornetis 2016; Quaggio and Contreras Zubillaga 2023; Molina-Agudo 2025a). However, as Sophie Baby, Olivier Compagnon, and Eduardo González observe, transitional periods also prove ‘conducive to the persistence or emergence of violence, whether as a result of a power vacuum and the space opened up for subversive action, or because of the coercive force of the authoritarian state’ (2009). This is why, alongside the expanded horizons opened up by post-authoritarian periods, publications are also privileged channels to expose ‘the boundaries

of censorship, political expression and personal freedom' (Cameron and McGlade 2020: 177) inherited from the previous regime.

This special issue examines such publishing practices over a geographical framework that spans from South America (Argentina, Uruguay, Chile) to the Iberian Peninsula (Portugal, Spain), with an opening towards the Arab region (Lebanon, Morocco). It thus offers a decentred perspective on a subject that is still too often confined to the Anglo-Saxon and Euro-American spheres of knowledge production. Without claiming to offer an exhaustive overview, but rather with the intention of establishing a dialogue with current and future work in this field, which may cover contexts beyond those addressed in this issue, the intention is to examine the underlying conditions and tensions to which this form of cultural expression responded, the aesthetic strategies it forged, and the aims it ultimately pursued.

The contributions gathered in the following pages offer different insights on the way self-managed forms of publishing challenged and unsettled the technological, social, and cultural transformations alongside processes of regime change. They also show that the practice of bringing printed objects to light was (and is) not only a response to current circumstances, but can also be invoked to shed new light on experiences that are more distant in space and time. Still too often considered a minor and unimportant activity in the field of art history, as various authors in this special issue have well pointed out, publishing 'against the grain' is, in fact, a slight, yet charged gesture.

An expanded field: publishing as a self-managed practice

With this issue, we want to look at the unity of a gesture: publishing in contexts of the cessation or breakdown of authoritarian rule. Focusing on the act of publishing allows us to bring into focus a set of social and technical practices involved in the production of unruly, diverse, and seemingly unconnected materials such as newsletters, booklets, and magazines. In so doing, it is possible to investigate how the publishing gesture operates as a common thread, but also generates highly distinctive features depending on the context. To this end, we have drawn on the so-called 'praxeological turn', and especially on the work of Annette Gilbert (2016; 2022), who has developed a specific methodology for studying artistic and intercultural publishing practices.

Gilbert's work reflects on those publications that place their ultimate meaning in the production process, in the becoming-work, rather than in the result, considering

them to be ‘works enshrined in practices’ (2022: 5-6). Following this path, the articles, interviews, and the visual essay featured here ultimately question the meaning of publishing ‘against the grain’, whether through the use of alternative production and distribution structures, through narratives that are more or less critical of the *status quo* and the established cultural industry, or through the mobilisation of radically different notions of what a book or a magazine is and can do.

Publishing and distributing publications through self-managed infrastructure involves taking different positions. Faced with an established media circuit determined by the cultural industry and bureaucratic provisions, these practices enable a counter-public sphere in which new channels are established to produce, exchange, and circulate information, while also creating spaces for encounter, discussion, and creation of community. In so doing, they constitute an exercise in world-building, as it is precisely the act of ‘making’, the act of ‘publishing’ itself that gives them their meaning. Their most relevant feature is how the work, creation, and distribution processes are organised, beyond the product itself.

Yet, aside from the social role of publications, the physicality and forms of the printed matter should not be neglected. The choice of a particular format or printing technique is just as significant as the actual content or message, insofar as it establishes a tactile, sensitive relationship with the audience and the space. That is to say, the formal features of publications also participate in this practical processuality through their aesthetic and sensory consequences.

The study of publications as objects enmeshed in broader technological, social, and cultural processes, exceeding their function as textual historical sources, remains a minority interest in academic research (Gilbert 2022: 103; Thoburn 2016: 13). This is particularly acute in the case of alternative self-publications, whose subordinate and precarious nature means they are considered minor in the historical canon, as Paula Guerra and Pedro Quintela (2021: 11) have pointed out. It is worth noting the important contribution of a modest but expanding interdisciplinary field, *Periodical Studies*, coined by Sean Latham and Robert Scholes (2006), which understands periodical publishing as a network of social, economic, and cultural relationships that transcend the textual medium.² In this regard, we are particularly interested in attempts to reflect on publishing at a historical, theoretical, and aesthetic level from a multidisciplinary perspective, as evidenced by the work of artist-researchers such as Antoine Lefebvre (2016), Bernhard Cella (2015), and Eva Weinmayr (2019; 2016), as well as that of Nicholas Thoburn (2016), Marie Boivent (2015), Alessandro Ludovico (2012), and Mela Dávila (2012; 2016; 2021), who, from the perspective of art history and cultural theory, exemplify the academic reception of this experimental approach.

² In Europe, we can highlight the work of the European Society for Periodical Research (ESPRit), a transnational research network whose journal traces this type of approach (Stead 2019; 2016; Dillane 2016).

As the work of these authors demonstrates, interest in these materials is increasing, inspiring exhibitions, specialised documentation centres, and a range of publications (Bandel, Gilbert, and Prill 2019). Such projects have flourished in southern Europe: in Italy, Dafne Boggeri and Sara Serighelli recently presented a critical selection of one hundred self-published zines from 1978 to 2006 that chronicled the country's recent history (Boggeri and Serighelli 2024); Paula Guerra and Pedro Quintela have promoted research on the role of self-publishing in urban social movements in the Portuguese context, also from a transnational perspective (Guerra and Quintela 2020; 2021); in Spain, we note the pioneering work of Anxo Rabuñal (2005), who produced an exhibition and a catalogue on the 'graphic sedition' that emerged in Galicia in the 70s and 80s; as well as the extensive research by Inés Molina (2025a; 2025b; 2023; 2018), dedicated to the marginal press in the post-Franco dictatorship. In a way that connects multiple national and local contexts in Latin America, the Red Conceptualismos del Sur and its members have played a crucial role in researching artists' publications and graphic practices, and reflecting on their archivation with collective projects like the exhibition 'Giro gráfico. Rumores y clamores del Sur' [Graphic Turn: Rumors and Clamors from the South] held in Montevideo (2023-2024), and its related publication (Alonso et. al. 2025).

A fundamental complement to such research is the creation of archives dedicated to these publications. Their preservation by individuals, associations and institutions, their digitisation and the provision of free access to researchers and a broader audience, as well as their republication or reedition are powerful means of keeping this heritage alive and of fostering its reinterpretation in the present. We should remember that, in addition to political circumstances, other factors, particularly economic, material, and personal, influence the preservation of these printed artefacts. As recent events related to censorship, infrastructure loss, and the violent destruction or erasure of publications, libraries, and spaces of debate around print material have shown, such publications remain subject to unpredictable contingencies and fragilities.³ In this sense, by no means should such publications be seen as testimonies or relics of a distant and bygone era, but rather as incentives to remain vigilant. In this way, this issue also seeks to question the power of these practices and objects in the present, highlighting their capacity to test alternative ways of understanding art and life in the face of the so-called contemporary 'authoritarian turn' (Bofo, Saad-Filho, and Fine 2019).

³ Among the unfortunately countless examples of actions against publishing and related infrastructure, we can cite PEN International 2025; Byrnes 2025; and Mateo Fano 2024. On the lack of infrastructures and state support in relation to Morocco and Lebanon, see also the interviews with *Bidayat* Magazine (Cynthia Kreichati and Jana Traboulsi) and Kenza Sefrioui in this special issue.

Intertwined temporalities of regime change

While academic research has contributed to considerably deepening our understanding of the role of self-publications as channels of resistance and dissent under dictatorship (Martínez Martín 2016; 2023; Feu 2020; Kind-Kovács, and Labov 2013), less attention has been paid to these publications in the aftermath. Focusing on post-dictatorship allows us to more precisely examine the specificity of this moment, while also opening up the possibility of making comparisons over a broader period of time and across different geographical areas. Indeed, the contributions to this special issue demonstrate that alternative, experimental, and underground publications have a striking tendency to proliferate in the years following the end of authoritarian regimes.

While the inventiveness of this medium under dictatorships is often attributed to a desire to circumvent or openly defy political violence and censorship, shifting this focus to contexts of post-dictatorship shows that its form and content cannot be interpreted as a simple response and adaptation to a hostile environment. These publications engage in a variety of strategies: infiltrating the hegemonic print media by imitating its appearance; using personal and everyday materials to counter institutional narratives; or prioritising a polyphony of voices and alternative ways of authorship over the pursuit of homogeneity and a unified 'aesthetic' linked to the cultural industry. In short, they seek to exercise freedom outside the social and political channels under reorganisation, highlighting unusual forms of political imagination and creativity in recent history.

In addition to channelling and documenting a new reality, self-publishing also intervenes directly in the historical moment by radically engaging with the political and cultural possibilities that such transitions may open up; by intervening within the new media, technological, and communicative processes that are coming into being, and reimagining forms of democratic organisation; and by reclaiming rights and freedoms that remain unresolved or unrealised. In this sense, the publications presented and discussed in this issue are dense with reflections and critiques of everyday life, from problems of habitability in neighbourhoods and urban centres to questions of gender, lingering repression, and violence. At the same time, they became the perfect platform for popular, alternative, and underground languages, cultures, or traditions, quite often obscured or persecuted by the previous regime.

One crucial difference of 'status' between publications created under dictatorships and those published after regime change lies in the fact that the latter are, at least in appearance, no longer threatened by censorship or destruction, and much less their authors and publishers by repression or death (Baby et al 2009).

Publishing in a post-dictatorship context necessarily involves an acute awareness of this shift in circumstances, insofar as such threats were either experienced firsthand by the authors or have been transmitted between generations. Yet publishing in post-dictatorship also embodies an uncomfortable position between two worlds or conditions: firstly, an awareness of a possible opening up to a larger part of society, and the enthusiasm it can generate; and secondly, a possible loss of motivation stemming from the perception that the ultimate political goals once pursued have dissolved and no longer hold the same meaning or urgency. Undoubtedly, experiencing and responding to such transformations, regardless of geography or historical period, implies a reconsideration of priorities that can be perceived as a shock.

The comparative perspective that the articles and interviews in this issue summoned aims to demonstrate that the mobilisation of a new approach to publishing is not based solely on the capacity of these cultural objects to intervene at the specific moment when the regime change took place, but also for revisiting its consequences and lasting effects years later. Indeed, the contributions adopt a diachronic perspective with regard to the relationship between publishing and post-dictatorship. These intertwined temporalities enable us to evaluate the ongoing relevance of alternative publications in temporal contexts beyond that of their original production, or what Janice Radway (2011) calls 'the afterlives of zines'. In other words, they highlight how these publications establish a 'visual-material bridge' between 'then' and 'now' that inscribes such political and cultural experimentation within a longer tradition (Rigney and Smits 2023: 23).

Distant, yet common practices

The post-dictatorial timeframe also enables us to connect cultural, social, and political experiences that occur in different geographies. The transnational perspective adopted in this special issue highlights the creative capacities of minor practices and interventions, as well as their ability to circulate and foster relationships other than official or institutional ones, across different kinds of geographical, symbolic, or metaphorical frontiers and boundaries (Lionnet and Shih 2005: 7). The transnational is invoked here as a historiographical positioning that helps distinguish differences and points of convergence that a more limited scale either obscures or frames from a different angle. It also functions as an invitation to understand mobility, and the very act of crossing boundaries, as a unique opportunity to create new landscapes, in which exchange and participation occupy a central place, making it 'possible for cultures to be produced and performed without necessary mediation by the center' (Lionnet and Shih 2005: 5).

These shared features and convergences are visible in the following contributions, despite the differing nature of regime change in the countries they address. In some cases, the process of democratic transition was initiated after a revolutionary upheaval (Portugal, 1974), while in others, it came about after the death of the dictator and was built on a series of agreements between political forces (Spain, 1975). We also find countries where the discrediting of the armed forces and economic crisis, combined with social protests, forced the authoritarian regime to call elections that would ultimately lead to the establishment of democracy (Argentina, 1983; Uruguay, 1985; Chile, 1990). In other cases, long periods of transformations after independence from a colonial rule were followed by tensions and repression under monarchy (Morocco, 1999), or by multiple social uprisings demanding democratic and secular reform (Lebanon, 2011, 2016, 2019). Some would argue that such examples from South West Asia and North Africa (SWANA) led authoritarian and corrupt regimes to their end.

The first two contributions to this issue focus on specific post-dictatorship moments, historically identified as such, and marked by an explosion of practices that both witnessed and actively participated in the process of societies opening up. In the first article, Evangelina Margiolakis provides an overview of the richness and diversity of countercultural publications in Argentina between the end of the civil-military dictatorship (1976-1983) and the first years of democracy. Her contribution gives a precise account of the social and political environment in which these projects developed, and invites reflection on the difficulty (not to say, impossibility) of dealing with these experiences without addressing the situation under dictatorship. Examining the case of magazines that existed on the borderline between one era and another, Margiolakis navigates this pitfall by proposing a chronological *découpage* focused on the long 1980s, allowing continuities and ruptures to become more visible. In the next contribution, the trajectory of Paula Ferreira, founder of Mundo da Banda Desenhada, the first comic bookshop opened in Lisbon after the Carnation Revolution (1974), is revisited by Paula Guerra from a feminist and post-feminist perspective. Drawing on her conversations with Ferreira, her article reconstructs the social and economic circumstances which surrounded her activity, and highlights the transnational and local networks underpinning the Portuguese underground and (post)punk scene. Denouncing gender inequality in the historiographical treatment of counterculture, Guerra builds on an analysis of the single-theme fanzine *Leitmotiv*, published by Ferreira, to show how DIY practices provided women with a powerful means of gaining autonomy and authenticity in the aftermath of the revolution.

In the third article, Márcia Oliveira tackles the experience of dictatorship as it resurfaces in contemporary art. In her case, this reverberation or echo is closely

related to Portugal's colonial history and processes of decolonisation, which are often rendered invisible in accounts of Salazar's dictatorship. Oliveira's reading of Ana Vidigal's artist's books, which combine photographs from her family album with plastic interventions, mobilises concepts such as the archive and the ruin to show how intimate and familiar traces resonate in the present and feed collective memory. Moving away from Vidigal's distinctive, handcrafted style, but with significant parallels to the centrality of manufacturing, the contributions by Mela Dávila Freire and Marie Boivent explore different uses and economies of experimental publishing in South America. Noting a porosity between the visual arts and literature specific to the Chilean context, Dávila Freire proposes a genealogy starting from infiltration in print media performed by artists in the 1970s and 1980s up to recent initiatives by collectives Jemmy Button Inc. and Muro Sur, and by artist Voluspa Jarpa. All of them relied on books and periodicals to respond to the need for the art scene to self-organise both locally and internationally, and to address the memory gaps and blind spots left by the dictatorship. It is no coincidence that these strategic repositionings involve collective action and participatory methodologies, two pillars of alternative and experimental publishing. Finally, Marie Boivent interrogates the meanings of re-edition as a committed gesture, based on the cases of Guillermo Deisler and Clemente Padín, two key figures of Latin American mail art and experimental publishing. Boivent examines the reelaboration by two contemporary independent publishers of some of Deisler and Padín's publications from the 1970s which circulated internationally — but not so much locally — as an expression of criticism and resistance against dictatorship. Her article highlights the work carried out by Naranja Publicaciones and Microutopías, who, far from simply republishing, make committed linguistic choices and engage in genuine reflection on the resonance of the medium in turbulent contemporary contexts.

A thread running throughout this special issue is the circulation, sharing, and translation of language — both visual and verbal — within these publications. In this regard, the importance of oral testimony could not be overlooked. We have sought to broaden and diversify the field of academic discussion by incorporating alternative perspectives on publishing and, in keeping with this issue's praxeological approach, by giving voice to the practitioners themselves. The 'Interviews' section, in which the interviewers (Myriam Dalal and María Gómez López, as well as ourselves) act as facilitators, reaffirms our commitment to the history of these practices and their protagonists, and highlights their vitality and relevance in the present. For its part, the interview with Lola Nomdedeu, Clara Beltrán and Uberto Stabile focuses on the history of the OCMO printing house, founded in the Pobladors Marítims [Maritime Neighbourhoods] of Valencia (Spain) in 1977, known for its community activism; and on the Bananas Collective for Free Creation, a driving force behind numerous countercultural initiatives in this city and beyond, that

printed their publications there. Looking back at the dynamics created around the printing house, whose origins lie precisely in an anti-Francoist organisation, the interview shows how the press functioned as a catalyst for unruly editorial actions and for social relations of solidarity forged in the context of the post-Franco regime. We are also very pleased to present in this issue interviews with Cynthia Kreichati and Jana Traboulsi, as well as with Kenza Sefrioui, important actors in the publishing landscape in the Arab region. In both cases, the notion of post-dictatorship cannot be understood in the same way as it is in the Iberian Peninsula or South America. It might be envisaged instead as a broader post-authoritarian framework in the context of the Arab Spring movements that emerged in the 2010s and that radically transformed the landscape of the region. Through the diffusion of writings that foster critical debates on culture and literature, the magazine *Bidayat* and the publishing house En Toutes Lettres, based in Beirut and Casablanca respectively, play a vital role as sounding boards for the need for greater transparency and democracy in their given societies. In a particularly unstable and dangerous context for fundamental human rights, with the genocide perpetrated in Gaza and the escalation of wars and imperialist military interventions which violate international law at the very moment we are writing these lines, their struggle for intellectual and cultural pluralism is all the more crucial and relevant.

Finally, as an intermission, this special issue includes a choral experiment in the form of a visual essay that composes a narrative with images from marginal and alternative press of the Spanish post-dictatorship. In these publications the image of the window emerges as a space of possibility, but also of silence, censure, and violence. We have chosen this motif, at times visual, at times iconographic or metaphoric, as an incentive to reflect on the different types of social, political, and aesthetic imagination that were born in the immediate years that followed the death of Franco. In this essay, the window appears in its capacity to be a space of communication between the inside and the outside; as a site of transition between present, future, and a (utopian) past to which one might perhaps wish to return (long before the dictatorship); a blank canvas available for anyone to intervene on. Yet also, in its connotations of confinement or prison, of seeing without reaching, the window, in our view, reflects what the creators of *Uronia*, a Spanish marginal publication from 1976, describe as ‘the pain of thousands of beings who still wait, with eyes furiously open, for the morning.’ May this issue open new, old, promising windows that allow us to look around with greater attention and curiosity at what is different and hidden in our societies.

INÉS MOLINA,
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LOLA VISGLERIO-GÓMEZ

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