

Experimental, Alternative, and Underground Publishing in Post-Dictatorship.

A Transnational Landscape (1970s-2020s)

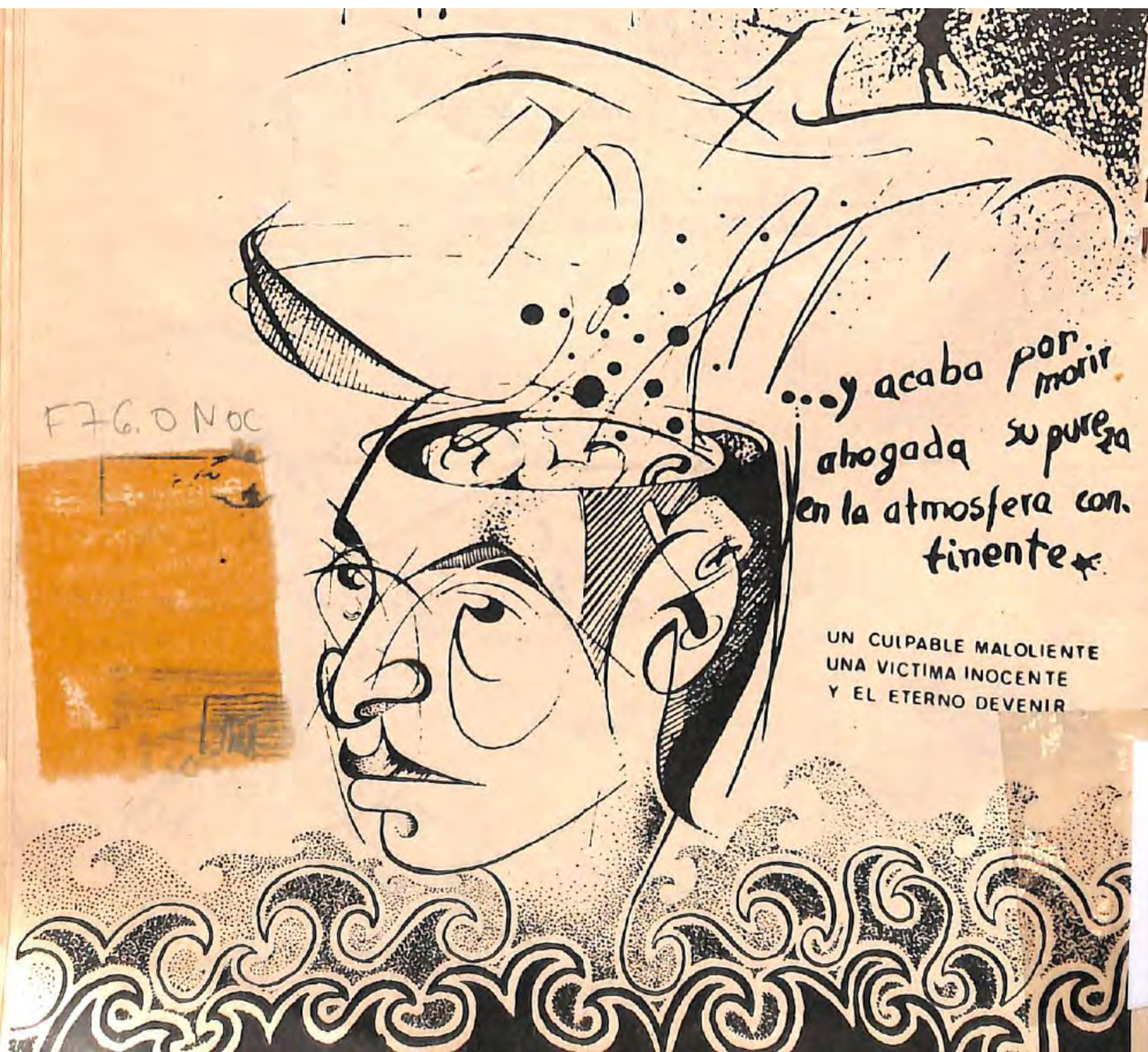


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UN CULPABLE MALOLIENTE
UNA VICTIMA INOCENTE
Y EL ETERNO DEVENIR



N. 21 March 2026

Instituto de História da Arte
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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,
JULIANE DEBEUSSCHER,
LOLA VISGLERIO-GÓMEZ

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Contributions

ABSTRACT

This article analyses a corpus of so-called countercultural magazines from 1980s Argentina. These graphic publications constituted artifacts that constructed sensitivities by developing modes of dissent against the ruling power, forms of territoriality, and insertion into the public sphere that allowed for the possibility of building political-affective networks. The approach adopted in the analysis has allowed us to understand these periodicals as devices involving discourses and practices that reveal ways of conceiving the world that helped shape subjectivities. A varied body of textual, visual, and contextual elements has been considered for this study.

The study puts forward a few hypotheses about the selected period, which includes both the final years of the last Argentine civil-military dictatorship (1976-1983) and the early years of post-dictatorship, revisiting the main topics discussed in the literature on the period. The analysis thus implies a consideration of the transformations that took place in these practices during this transition period from dictatorship to democracy, in order to account for ruptures and continuities in their development.

keywords

CULTURAL JOURNALISM
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Argentine Countercultural Magazines in the 1980s: a Reading in Context

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Introduction

This paper proposes an analysis of Argentine countercultural¹ or underground magazines (*revistas subterráneas*) from the 1980s, a decade that includes the last years of the Argentine civil-military dictatorship and the first years of the post-dictatorship, a period of study that allows us to discover ruptures and continuities between authoritarianism and democracy. In order to understand the post-dictatorship years, it is necessary to examine with some detail the preceding period under dictatorship, analysing those traces, reverberations and also changes in the passage to the post-dictatorship.

Creating a specific articulation between aesthetics and politics, underground magazines strained the public space, presenting themselves as a confrontative alternative to the commercial press and official culture. They also challenged the limits imposed by power through their projects of political and cultural intervention in public life, their disruptive graphic proposals, and the recovery of traditions often opposed to those adopted by the mass or hegemonic press.

During the last Argentine dictatorship (1976–1983), the military regime deployed a series of strategies aimed at gaining popular support, implementing repressive measures and seeking to generate consensus and support among the population through a series of propaganda campaigns in public and private media (Risler 2018; Schenquer 2022). The military's cultural and communications policy was rationally planned around 'anti-subversive struggle' and the establishment of

¹ In Argentina, 'countercultural', 'underground', and 'alternative' were the terms used to characterise this type of dissident press by both those who participated in these practices and those who reflected on them. These terms began to be used during dictatorship and gained greater visibility and relevance during the post-dictatorship period.

a re-foundational process (Risler and Schenquer 2018). After the coup of 24 March 1976, the dictatorship immediately launched a systematic plan of repression and forced disappearances. On a symbolic level, a series of cultural policies emanating from the military regime promoted censorship, self-censorship, and ideological prohibitions, while propaganda mechanisms aimed at generating support were deployed at various levels.

Other practices developed alongside these disciplining policies, on the fringes or even openly challenging the limits imposed by military power regarding their mechanisms of censure, persecution and forced disappearances. Within this framework, a diverse and heterogeneous set of cultural magazines,² known as ‘underground magazines’, emerged with the aim of voicing ideas and views that were not allowed to circulate in the mainstream society of the period. Contrary to the belief that the dictatorship uniformly implemented processes of forced silence and confinement, these publications allow us to recognise a certain cultural effervescence despite the repressive policies of the regime. While these magazines maintained their initial fervour during the early years of the post-dictatorship period, developed distinctive aesthetic and political proposals, and fostered debates about the role of intellectuals in the public sphere and in the new democratic context, the initial enthusiasm gradually waned.

These dissident graphic experiences and editorial projects can be seen both as modes of dissent against the ruling power and as forms of territoriality and insertion into public space, representing the possibility of building affective networks of resistance. The perspective adopted here understands periodical publications as performative devices involving discourses and practices that shape subjectivities.

Drawn from Raymond Williams’s (2010) cultural materialism, the concepts of ‘cultural formations’ or ‘cultural groups’³ enable analysis of movements or tendencies that prove effective in a given society and time, allowing us to corroborate the dynamism of the cultural sphere and the capacity of these cultural groups for independent initiatives which challenge power both in dictatorship and in democracy. Due to the political context at the time, the magazines studied here emerged as a means of expression for private study groups working with texts of limited circulation at universities. These formations felt the need to express their concerns and make themselves known, even in a context of state terrorism and the drastic curtailment of possibilities for expression.

² The most important publications were *Mutantia*, *El Ornitórrinco*, *Nudos*, *Xul*, *Último Reino*, *Poddema*, *Signo Ascendente* and *Sitio*, among others.

³ From the perspective of cultural materialism, Raymond Williams (2010) characterises *cultural groups* or *formations* as more or less informal forms of organisation or self-organisation linked to cultural production that differ — in various degrees — from formal institutions, which possess more enduring and lasting life and organic regulations. He defines them as effective movements and trends in intellectual and artistic life that have a significant and sometimes decisive influence on the active development of a culture.

Argentine society during dictatorship and post-dictatorship

Argentina's last civil-military dictatorship implemented a project called 'corporate liberalism', which resulted in a shift in the profile of the ruling class and in a significant increase of poverty, marginalisation, and social exclusion. The 1976 military coup altered the productive structure of the economy, leading to the closure of many small and medium-sized businesses, a major decline in the living conditions and purchasing power of the working class, growing oligopolisation, changes in the pattern of foreign trade in manufactured goods, and the consolidation of prevailing economic groups amid increasing foreign debt (Aspiazu and Schorr 2010). The working classes and low-income population segments experienced regressive income redistribution and social discipline, with their rights to decent wages, healthcare, employment, and education severely impaired. The growth of the economic and institutional power of a group of large oligopolistic corporations meant it was profitable for this new and predominant fraction of the ruling class to support the military establishment in its pursuit of state terrorism and the repression of social protest.

At the political level, the situation was equally dire, with political opposition persecuted during the early years of the dictatorship. In the context of a subsequent governance crisis, the military pursued a civil-military solution, with the military junta retaining control over the activities of political parties and leaving no room for any form of opposition. Severely weakened, the traditional parties refused to lead the anti-dictatorship struggle as they lacked confidence in their own capacity to confront the dictatorship in times of crisis (Pucciarelli 2004).

This re-foundational plan implemented by the military regime in the economic, social, and political spheres was accompanied by repressive policies, but also by cultural measures aimed at generating consensus in the population. This cultural program was made possible by the media, which disseminated a series of values intended to generate support among the population. In this way, the military regime saw culture and communication as relevant for disseminating its objectives and interests.

Our analysis will focus on the cultural sphere as it appears from the perspective of its 'relative autonomy', which means, first, examining its relationship of reciprocal influence with other spheres, and, then, identifying its particular dynamics (Williams 2015). Following this approach, the symbolic sphere appears as a space of dispute over the meanings and values surrounding a given society, in which the media constitute relevant social actors for the dissemination of said meanings and values through ideas, images, and practices that, in turn, validate the specific economic and social order that those same values and meanings represent. In this

context of dispute over symbolic meaning and values, economic and social transformations and the military regime's project to dismantle popular organisations were accompanied by a set of measures aimed at defining a common enemy that the military identified as Marxism and subversion (Gociol and Invernizzi 2002). Implemented by both state agencies and civilian sectors, the regime enacted mechanisms of propaganda, psychological action and censorship, in the construction of this 'other', identified as a 'subversive' threat. These measures aimed to impose a cultural and ideological model that included certain values, behavioural patterns, and norms of conduct (Risler 2018). The regime developed a strict set of regulations aimed at controlling the media and the National Social Communication Plan of 1977 sought to disseminate the actions and achievements of the National Government, advocating the validity of Christian moral values and the dignity of being 'Argentine', alongside the importance of family values in protecting youth from the infiltration of 'foreign ideologies.'

In this repressive context, other initiatives and practices dared to challenge this hegemonic order. Underground cultural magazines reflected a compelling need for expression and openly confronted the dictatorship's modes of control through attitudes and aesthetic preferences, social networks and group formation, and writing styles.

Subsequently, the beginning of the post-dictatorship period — with Raúl Alfonsín coming to power on 10 December 1983 — was marked by a fragile democracy exposed to strong pressures mostly stemming from powerful economic groups and the military. Several authors have characterised this type of transition as 'transition by collapse' since, unlike what happened in other Southern Cone countries, such as Uruguay, Brazil, and Chile, in Argentina the conditions for a 'negotiated' transition had not been generated (Nun and Portantiero 1987). After years of repression, Alfonsín's constitutional government (1983–1989), threatened by military and economic power, sought to provide interpretative keys for understanding the dire events of the dictatorship period by focusing on two factors: on the one hand, the Malvinas War, understood as the prolongation of state terrorism and, on the other, the impunity of hegemonic corporate and military powers, which had not been dismantled in the post-dictatorship period (Pucciarelli 2006; Gómez 2024). In this context, countercultural magazines generated heated debates around the transition to democracy, the role of intellectuals in this period, and the importance of the public sphere as a relevant place for democracy where people can discuss issues of common interest.

On periodisation and transition: the cultural 1980s

We will develop some hypotheses about the 1980s, the selected period of study, comprising the final years of Argentina's last civil-military dictatorship and the early post-dictatorship period, examining topics related to the idea of transition, democratic opening and post-dictatorship. This will also entail an examination of the transformations these practices underwent during the transition from dictatorship to post-dictatorship, in order to identify patterns of continuity and rupture.

The 1980s in Argentina coincided with the last years of dictatorship and, in particular, with the period known as the transition to democracy, which spanned the final years of the military regime, when the crisis of authoritarian rule began to become all too evident. The term 'democratic transition' emerged within a professionalisation of political studies that sought to discuss possible directions for post-authoritarian governments in Latin America, including the recovery of civil rights and political freedoms (Garretón 1995). The idea of transition thus made it possible to envisage an alternative to military dictatorships. Cecilia Lesgart (2003) has studied the concept, characterising it as a spatiotemporal metaphor useful to describe the process of decomposition of the military regime, which, in the Argentine case, deepened after the Malvinas War.⁴ This process was accompanied by calls from various segments of society for the return of democratic institutions, and by human rights organisations redoubling their demands for justice and their denunciation of forced disappearances.

The transition was a gradual process that started the moment counterinsurgency ceased to be the unifying element of the military forces (Canelo 2008; 2016). Marina Franco's (2018) analysis characterises the transition as the period between 1979 and 1983, beginning with the process of delegitimisation of the military regime. The author points out that already in 1979 — even a few months before — there were clear signs of the Armed Forces' weakening and their shift to more defensive positions in the exercise of power. A turning point was the loss of the Malvinas War, after which the political and social context grew more tense and an anti-military resistance took hold amid a general rejection of the military regime's policies. (Águila 2023). In this context, a series of mass marches, neighbourhood protests, and cultural and political movements emerged that had an important bearing on the regime's downfall.

For countercultural or underground magazines, this transition period coincided with the creation of collective spaces and networks of alternative cultural publications that began to emerge in 1979, the year in which Asociación de Revistas Culturales Argentinas (ARCA)⁵ was created, and later, starting in 1980, Agrupación

⁴ The war in the South Atlantic between Argentina and the United Kingdom began on 2 April 1982 and ended on 14 June 1982. The conflict exposed the crisis of the Argentine military regime, which resorted to this strategy to remain in power (Canelo 2008; Franco 2018).

⁵ Association of Argentine Cultural Magazines.

de Revistas Alternativas (ARA)⁶, Grupo Alternativo de Trabajo Antimitomanía (GATA),⁷ and Asociación de Publicaciones Alternativas de Rosario (APAR),⁸ among other groups in different Argentine cities. This confluence of graphic experiences promoted the creation of networks linking magazines' projects with other cultural practices, a process that allowed for the emergence of wider resistance fronts that gradually began to publicly demand the end of the dictatorship.

Regarding this period of formation of resistance fronts, Ramiro Manduca (2022) highlights the role played by Teatro Abierto and the experiences of 'molecular'⁹ theatrical resistance that led to the creation of an opposition cultural movement that, initiated in 1981, later shifted toward an alternative perspective in democratic times. Another relevant phenomenon that developed in the transition to democracy was the emergence of feminist magazines such as *Todas* [All Women], *Alfonsina*, and *Brujas* [Witches] — part of the ATEM group.¹⁰ A weekly section entirely devoted to emerging gender issues was also published for the first time in a newspaper with the *La Mujer* [The Woman] supplement of the *Tiempo argentino* newspaper (1982–1986). The supplement — which gradually grew in importance — proposed feminism in action, addressing various topics related to women's everyday lives and problems. These undertakings played an important role during the period, when previously taboo issues began to be addressed publicly in these alternative media, with the vindication of women's and sexual minorities' rights reaching public attention.

The anti-dictatorial cultural fronts that emerged in the transition period began to raise the idea of 'resistance', and, in particular, the powerful idea of 'molecular resistance'. This idea of resistance as an operative category was widely used in Argentina in the 1980s, in a context of appropriation of Cultural Studies (Hall and Jefferson 2010; Williams 2015), allowing these burgeoning groups to construct a theoretical frame of reference for marginal practices that coordinated their efforts in their struggle to put an end to authoritarianism.

In the post-dictatorship period, Nicolás Cuello and Lucas Disalvo (2019) studied a group of independent publications, graphic artifacts, and experiences of countercultural organisation that appeared in Buenos Aires' underground scene under the Alfonsín government. The authors observe that these graphic devices contributed to processes of subjectivation through discourses, knowledge, and images that privileged a radical politics of the body and its pleasures, presenting the *Resistencia* zine [Resistance] (1984–2001) as a paradigmatic example. These practices helped shape alternative lifestyles and local forms of the punk aesthetic and contributed to the formation of anti-authoritarian sensibilities. Daniela Lucena and Gisela Laboureau (2016) also describe a series of cultural practices from the post-dictatorship period, a network of poetic-political experiences that renewed

⁶ Association of Alternative Magazines.

⁷ Alternative Anti-Mythomania Working Group.

⁸ Rosario Alternative Publications Association.

⁹ The idea of 'molecular' or 'molecular resistance' refers to the characteristics of certain practices during the dictatorship. Arising spontaneously and disjointedly, these practices attempted to repair some parts of the damaged social fabric.

¹⁰ Asociación de Trabajo y Estudio sobre la Mujer [Association for the Work and Study on Women].

the cultural and artistic scenes of the cities and sought to rebuild social bonds based on alternative and festive forms of sociability.

By the mid-1980s, in a context of democratic institutions, numerous cultural and communication practices underwent significant transformations in their initial objectives and projects. In those years, debates began — also appearing in various countercultural magazines — about the role of the intellectual, the utopian horizons that had played a key role in the transition from dictatorship to democracy, and retrospective readings about exile and the culture of resistance (Franco 2018; Cristiá 2021). In this context, countercultural or underground magazines and dissident print media took on new characteristics, and the countercultural scene shifted toward the punk universe, the hierarchisation of science fiction, the visibility of sexuality and sexual dissidence, and the body as a central focus of interest.

Finally, in the late 1980s, numerous cultural projects, including various alternative magazines, began a commercial drift that would eventually lead to their dissolution or transformation. Under a political and social climate of disenchantment, a series of events sparked off a governance crisis, revealing the fragility and instability of the democratic institutions.¹¹

While the transition to democracy had coalesced certain expectations linked to the refoundation of institutions, the promise of equal access to democratic guarantees, the recognition of human and sexual rights, among other claims, these hopes were shattered in the late 1980s by events such as the economic decline, the enforcement of impunity laws for the military, and subsequently, under the presidency of Carlos Menem, the crisis unleashed as a consequence of a neoliberal economic and social model and the pardons of convicted military figures. These events marked the decline of democratic promises.

Underground, countercultural, alternative press

The ‘underground’ category, as used in this study, refers to media outlets that emerged as a response to disciplinary mechanisms in repressive contexts. In Latin America, underground magazines emerged in the 1960s in the context of dictatorial processes, driven by the need for expression and to question the established order. However, ‘underground’ did not necessarily imply clandestinity, but rather alluded to the adoption of a dissenting stance against authoritarian power. While certain publications echoed the official canon and accepted the dominant discourse, these magazines revisited different resistance traditions, recovering modes of communication that challenged censorship and authoritarianism. The productivity and

¹¹ Previously, in 1986, as a result of pressure from the military, the Full Stop Law (*Ley de Punto Final*) was passed, which mandated an end to the investigation and prosecution of military and security officers accused of state repression. The Carapintada mutiny of 1987 led to the passage in that same year of the Due Obedience Law (*Ley de Obediencia Debida*), shielding military personnel involved in crimes against humanity from prosecution (De Diego 2025).

fervour of these practices contributed to generating public friction during the last civil-military dictatorship in Argentina. In some cases, their editorial programmes were related to human rights organisations or political parties, though this connection was indirect due to the prevailing repression.

The idea of a journalism independent of commercial interests, which privileged poetic freedom and collaborative work, was common to this type of publications, variously referred to as ‘underground’, ‘subterranean’, ‘alternative’, or ‘counter-cultural’. This idea of the ‘underground’, as restricted to specific experiences in Latin America, was employed to refer to those specific experiences that challenged the established order in dictatorial contexts, in this particular case, within the context of the last civil-military dictatorship in Argentina (1976–1983), although these practices continued in the post-dictatorship period.

Several authors have argued that the underground press in Argentina emerged as the result of the activities of some cultural groups of young people that gathered during the last dictatorship. These groups functioned as spaces for expression, socialisation, and the building of close collective ties, thus managing to survive the censorship imposed by state terrorism (Marcus 2017). Albeit of limited circulation, their value lay in operating as a cultural medium that helped create collective networks. Their choice of formal or rhetorical devices allowed them to allude to a social and political context marked by terror and the persecution of dissident voices. Their creators consisted of high school and university students, poets, writers, journalists, and activists, among others (Warley 1993).

While this type of press originated in Argentina with publications such as *Eco contemporáneo* [Contemporary Echo] and *Contracultura* [Counterculture] since the early 1960s and including Onganía’s military coup (1966–1970),¹² the last Argentine dictatorship was a period characterised by the proliferation of a large number of underground magazines that had a conflictive relationship with the military and somehow managed to circumvent the control of their repressive mechanisms. Cecily Marcus’ (2017) research in this area finds that these publications were responsible for highlighting the concerns of younger generations, not only in relation to literature and political definitions, but also in other disciplines. With little financial support, almost all of them included an editorial that constituted a brief manifesto introducing the magazine guidelines. The articles included criticism, political praxis, and aesthetic reviews, allowing for a wide variety of topics and approaches. While they may have included a variety of interests, they have been recovered by recent cultural studies mostly for their political and cultural programmes, for their vitality and, in particular, their confrontation with the corridors of power. José Luis De Diego (2025) described the experience of these underground magazines, examining them as a space of dispute over hegemony

¹² Both magazines were edited by Miguel Grinberg. *Eco contemporáneo* was published in the 1960s, and *Contracultura* in the early 1970s.

during the dictatorship and post-dictatorship into the literary field. Roxana Patiño's studies (2006) have described a set of publications named magazines of 'resistance' or 'dissidence' to the dictatorship, and characterised by a common stance in the context of cultural oppression. Silvia Guiard (2006) focused on the capacity of these practices to unite different views and create alternative spaces to hold meetings, coordinate events, organise sales of banned books, publish works by young poets and storytellers, discuss aesthetic movements such as surrealism, and create theatre, film or music cycles.¹³

The idea of 'counterculture' referred to those practices that, by their very nature, opposed official culture, either due to their non-commercial nature or in their discussion of certain issues. Challenging the values of mainstream culture, countercultural movements emerged between the 1950s and 1970s as a form of protest against the capitalist consumer society. In opposition to the bourgeois way of life, they questioned consumerism, wealth, selfishness, and inequality. Two important social phenomena of this general trend were the Beat movement, emerging in the United States in the 1950s, and, later, the hippie movement, appearing in San Francisco in the second half of the 1960s. Both movements questioned the social system and its conventions, and had important writers, musicians, film directors, and painters among their followers. One of the most notable figures in this context in the United States was Thomas Merton, who maintained an important correspondence with Miguel Grinberg, a figure of Argentine counterculture.

'Alternative communication' or 'alternativity', on the other hand, refer to a set of Latin American experiences that proliferated in the early 1970s, alluding to a type of journalism that proposed an agenda different from that of the hegemonic press, characterised as it was by its commercialism and the reproduction of the values of the official culture. The communication model differed completely from that of the commercial mass media, as representative of the dominant culture, championing values such as equal access, participation in the production of messages, and collective decision-making in order to give voice to marginalised groups in society. The rationale for alternativity was presented as a differentiating option as compared to the ownership structure, organisational form, and content adopted by the mass media. This characterisation cannot be fully grasped without considering its relationship with the social political context in which it took place.

During the last dictatorship and the post-dictatorship, the main axis of the world of underground magazines was dissent from the official discourse: they criticised authoritarianism and presented a different approach in terms of their editorial stance, the topics explored, the use of symbolic practices that opposed official culture, and their non-commercial nature. They established a particular relationship with the reader, who was challenged to play an active and critical role.

¹³ In 1979, the ARCA collective held a press conference expressing its opposition to the prevailing censorship.

At the same time, they emerged as a means of expression for critically engaged groups of young people, allowing them to experiment with 'other' modes of storytelling. During the period, the terms 'underground', 'countercultural', and 'alternative' were used interchangeably, further blurring the boundaries between these concepts. Despite their differences in relations to these terms, all these cultural endeavours shared a particular mode of criticism of official culture, a type of communication opposed to vertical organisation, and were characterised by experimentation with writing styles that challenged the established order.

Different publication categories

In order to more clearly characterise the different graphic experiences, we will map out different publications categories or groupings.¹⁴ It is important to point out that all the selected magazines belonged to the underground and were characterised as such both by their contemporary protagonists and by scholars subsequently. Beyond their differences in publishing style, subjects, formats, and aesthetics, they are all considered underground for presenting a clearly distinct programme that confronted ruling power.

A first publication group includes magazines such as *Mutantia* and *Antimitomanía* [Antimythomania], which drew heavily on the countercultural movement that emerged in the United States in the 1950s, linked to the Beat philosophy and later to the hippie culture in the following decade. They incorporated ideas of notable figures of the U.S. counterculture such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, which allowed them to connect with Argentine rock culture, engaging many of its followers in a fruitful dialogue. These magazines also drew attention to ecological concerns, promoted pacifist values, and featured writer, rock critic, essayist and poet Miguel Grinberg as an inspirational figure of Argentine counterculture.

Grinberg was also instrumental in the creation of *Antimitomanía* (1974–1981), having gifted its creator and director Daniel Serra complete collections of the two magazines he had produced: *Eco contemporáneo* (published in the 1960s) and *Contracultura* (published between 1970 and 1971). Inspired by these counterculture magazines, Serra decided to create his own publication in 1974. After a break, the magazine was relaunched in September 1979. The magazine's editorials promoted counterculture values, proposed a balance between the individual and the world, upheld environmental awareness and the defence of freedom, and presented a critique of the oppressive conditions of consumerist capitalist society.

In June 1980, Grinberg published *Mutantia* (1980–1985) in book form for the first time, running for 22 issues. In its first edition, he reproduced a statement by

¹⁴ As a result of this research, some of the magazines are digitised and available at: <https://www.archivosenuso.org/>.

Fig. 1 Cover of *El Ornitorrinco* [The Platypus] no. 10, October–November 1981. Source: <https://ahira.com.ar/>.



Thomas Merton in which he analysed the violence of the system. The statement, accompanied by images of acts of repression, criticised torture at a time when the regime in Argentina was implementing a systematic plan of disappearances, torture, and repression. *Mutantia* published transcripts of unpublished letters by Thomas Merton and by Ernesto Cardenal. Dating from 1963 and 1966, Merton's letters to Grinberg emphasise the importance of exchange, particularly to familiarise people in the United States with the cultural vitality of Latin American countries. Merton also acknowledged a close connection with his friends in Nicaragua, such as Ernesto Cardenal, a priest and poet.

A second set of publications might be taken as encompassing literary magazines such as *El ornitorrinco* [The Platypus] (1977–1986) [Fig. 1]. Directed by writer Abelardo Castillo, this publication recovered the figure of the committed

intellectual. This literary endeavour was carried out by a group of young people that took part in a literary workshop and was coordinated by its director. Its critique of the prevailing context of censorship is easily recognisable in its pages, as is the debate of controversial issues, the most prominent being an exchange with writer Julio Cortázar regarding his forced exile during the military regime. For its director, the magazine embodied the explicit decision to ‘do something’ against the dictatorship, a decision that prompted the use of oblique ways of saying things to bypass censorship. In its first editorial, the magazine described the art of writing as an act in favour of life. During the post-dictatorship period — and even earlier — the magazine covered topics such as the meaning of democracy, changes in cultural journalism regarding the possibility (or impossibility) of discussing controversial topics, and the politicisation of certain issues. In 1986, it reproduced and supported the demands of human rights organisations against laws granting impunity to the military. Its editorial, signed by the magazine’s staff, also bore the signature of Abelardo Castillo, a member of the Board of Directors of the *Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos* (APDH).¹⁵

A third set of publications is linked to the cultural tradition of left-wing political parties. While this connection was not explicit or organic, the party tradition was clearly noticeable in the topics dealt with, the discussions held, and especially through the works and authors it drew on.

Contexto [Context] (1977–1984), a publication linked to the Communist Party, reclaimed figures and aesthetic movements representative of the Argentine communist tradition, such as Brecht’s theatre, César Vallejo’s literature, and Antonio Berni’s muralism.¹⁶ This project was conceived at a time when the party’s official cultural magazine, *Cuadernos de cultura* [Culture Notebooks], was banned. It was directed by the intellectual Ariel Bignami, member of the Argentine Communist Party. The magazine included articles on Russian cinema and Karl Marx’s aesthetic legacy, and also addressed Latin American topics such as adult literacy in the revolutionary process in Nicaragua. Although more professionally designed, *Contexto* was still recognised as part of the underground press for its solidarity with publications sharing the same cultural world, its participation in resistance networks such as ARCA, and its recovery of traditionally left-wing topics and cultural concerns linked to the avant-garde or national and popular culture.

On the other hand, the magazines *Posta* (1977–1978) and *Nudos* [Knots] (1978–1992)¹⁷ [Fig. 2] had close links with the Partido Comunista Revolucionario (PCR),¹⁸ especially among some of their editors, and their editorial line held national, popular, and anti-imperialist views linked to Maoism. A relevant feature of these publications was their metaphorical and elliptical mention of the forced disappearance of people, repression, and censorship, as well as their strong focus on the

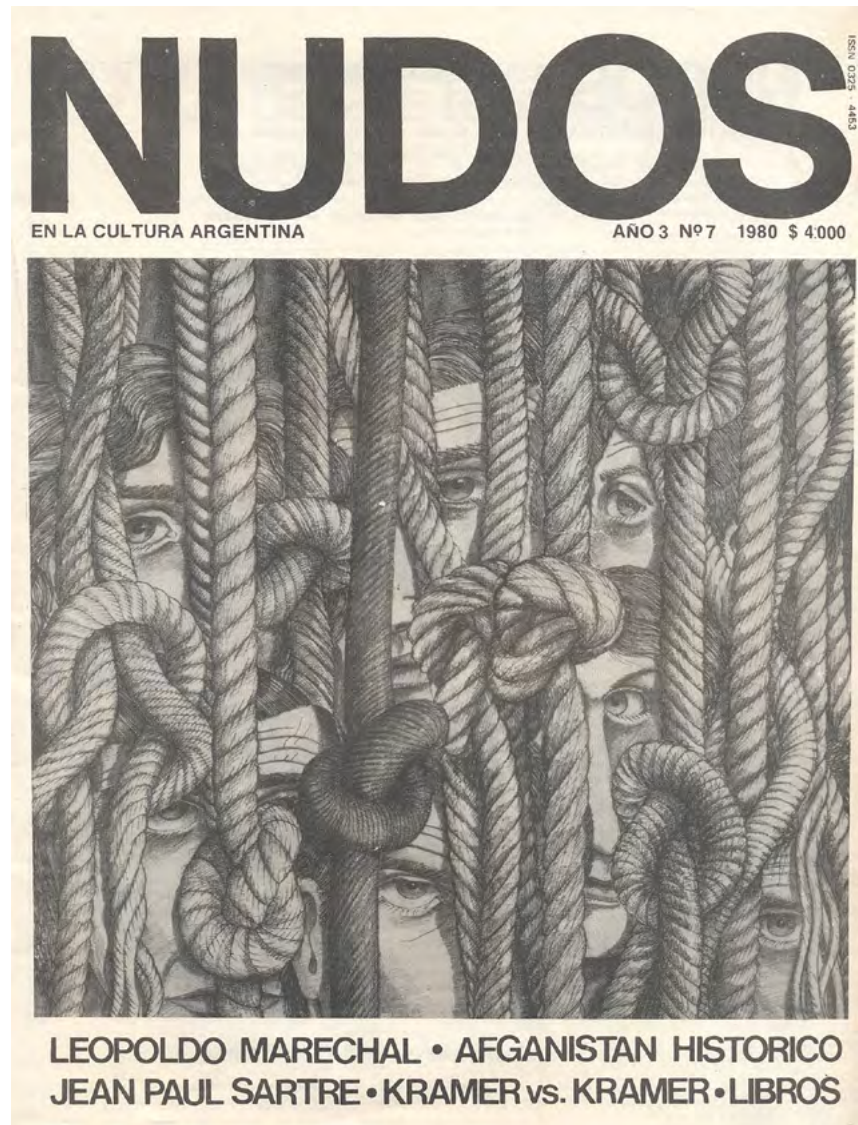
¹⁵ Permanent Assembly for Human Rights.

¹⁶ It should be noted that the Argentine Communist Party’s (PCA) cultural programme included a Latin American and anti-imperialist perspective, in addition to the international recognition of works and authors linked to the tradition of Soviet communism. However, on the political level, the PCA contrasted the Argentine dictatorship with Pinochetism, considering the latter more ‘harsh’ and violent. In the post-dictatorship period, within the framework of the 16th Congress of the Argentine Communist Party in 1986, its youth promoted a self-criticism regarding this characterisation of the Argentine military regime by the party during the dictatorship.

¹⁷ The magazine was renamed *Nudos* since its previous name, *Posta*, was already registered.

¹⁸ Communist Revolutionary Party.

Fig. 2 Cover of *Nudos* [Knots] no. 7, 1980.
Source: <https://archivosenuso.org/>.



anti-fascist struggle. In the democratic period, *Nudos*, directed by the artist Manuel Amigo and the writer Jorge Brega, did much to bring into the public's eye the experiences of cultural resistance that were then developing, incorporating reflections on poetry under the dictatorship, the role of the media, the new international order, and other artistic endeavours based on popular and politically committed works. The anti-fascist struggle also employed other symbolic practices during the dictatorship, eventually resulting in the creation of an anti-dictatorial front in which the magazine *Nudos* played an active role.

Also within the set of magazines devoted to the recovery of left-wing party traditions we find *Propuesta para la juventud* [Proposal for Youth] (1977-1980), closely linked to the Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (PST).¹⁹ This graphic endeavour focused on promoting self-expression among the young through poetry and music, and called for active youth participation. Born as the initiative of young people from the suburbs (Quilmes), the magazine gradually increased in size and circulation. Unlike other underground publications, its central focus was on music, particularly rock, with Miguel Grinberg making regular and important contributions. The publication also included sections on poetry, theatre and records, discussions about literary genres, sexuality, national cinema, and a section designed by and for women. Under editor-in-chief Roberto Catania and director Silvio Winderbaum, the magazine invited its readers to participate through poems and the proposal of new ideas, based on the concept that it did not belong to an editorial team but to its readers.

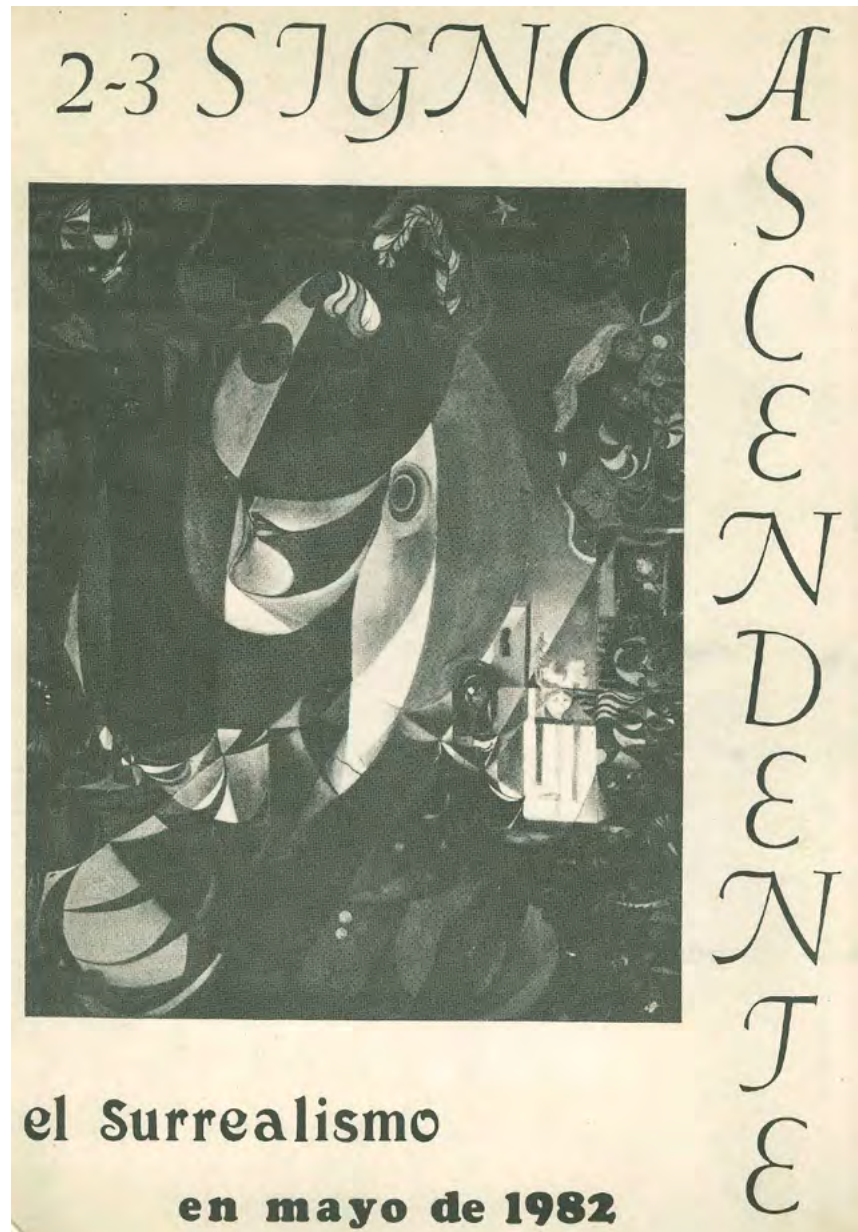
On the other hand, *Cuadernos del camino* [Journey Notebooks] (1978-1980), linked through some of its publishers to the PST, viewed artistic expression and collaboration in the media as a form of collective work. Directed by Mónica Giustina and, after its third issue, by Alicia Padula, the magazine was devoted to experimental cultural productions critical of what was regarded as 'bourgeois' art. Within this framework, the experience of the Taller de Investigación Teatral (TIT), a project conceived by some PST members (although this relationship only became explicitly known several years later) played an important role in the magazine.

A fourth set includes publications such as *Poddema* (1979-1980), and its later version *Signo ascendente* [Rising Sign] (1980-1982) [Fig. 3], which offered an idiosyncratic appropriation of the surrealist movement during the dictatorship. The use of this avant-garde movement as a form of activism reflects the importance of surrealist groups in the articulation between art and politics. This appropriation of surrealism proved critical for the recovery of the unconscious with its emphasis on desire, even in a context of censorship, forced silence and repression. The production of these magazines required enormous efforts under adverse conditions. Artisanally printed and hand-sewn, they were produced on a small scale (between 100 and 200 copies). Self-sustained projects, neither *Poddema* nor *Signo ascendente* received any external funding.

The first *Poddema* issue, published in July 1979, conceived its editorial as a manifesto or programmatic declaration, advancing the revival of the surrealist movement of the early 20th century. It argued that true art should express the real needs of humanity, encouraged the exploration of unrestricted imagination, and sought to promote the artistic avant-garde. In October 1980, the publishing team decided to rename the magazine *Signo ascendente* and expanded its editorial staff. Alberto Valdivia was the editor of both endeavours.

¹⁹ Workers Socialist Party.

Fig. 3 Cover of *Signo ascendente*
[Rising Sign] nos. 2-3, May 1980.
Source: <https://archivosenuso.org/>.



The first *Signo ascendente* editorial made explicit reference to the dictatorial regime and the crisis unleashed by its policies. 'Life being annihilated by a germ' and 'the internalisation of terror' were some of the expressions used by the editorial group to characterise the weariness and fear that permeated the everyday life of the population. It also criticised censorship and the curtailment of free expression, reduced to the limits of the bearable. In 1982, the Malvinas War accelerated the loss of the

military regime's legitimacy and *Signo ascendente* questioned the conflict and openly expressed its rejection of the *de facto* government. Its last issue in 1982 included an untitled statement on its back cover characterising the war as a threat of barbarism and violence. During this period of regime exhaustion and crisis, members of the surrealist group participated in a counter-protest against the Malvinas War celebrations, distributing the statement about the war they had published in the magazine. However, this was one of the group's last activities. The end of the dictatorship led to the disappearance of the magazine, although the group continued publishing poems and organising surrealist events under the same name for a few more years.

A fifth set of magazines was dedicated to poetry, including publications such as *Último reino* [Last Kingdom] (1979–1987), which understood poetry, particularly that linked to Romanticism, as a privileged form of expression, and *Xul* (1980–1994) [Fig. 4], which conceived writing as a ludic form of creation and experimentation that allowed the exercise of freedom under imposed terror. *Último reino* was directed by Gustavo Margulies and Víctor Redondo, while *Xul*'s editorial board included writers such as Jorge Perednik, Laura Klein, and Leonardo Scolnick, among others. While both publications stressed the role of poets in society and shared common traits, such as the presence of young writers committedly involved in the development of these editorial projects and the importance attached to poetry as a privileged form of expression, they represented different ways of approaching the poetic phenomenon: the romantic spirit of the poetry published in *Último reino* sharply contrasted with *Xul*, which revered the Argentine artist Xul Solar and favoured a poetics of estrangement in the use of language more in tune with avant-garde experimentation.

A sixth set of publications is ideologically and thematically linked to the New Left, including magazines such as *Ulises* (1978–1979), *Nova arte* (1978–1980), and *Sitio* [Place] (1981–1987). *Ulises* focused on the relationship between literature and 'social being', and between aesthetics and politics. Under the direction of Horacio García, Horacio Tarcus and Gabriel Rot, the magazine's first editorial stated an intention to address an urgent cultural need. By denouncing the obsolescence of inherited aesthetic norms, it sought to contribute to the construction of new forms of expression that would allow new generations of writers to manifest their views more freely.

For mostly budgetary reasons, after its third issue *Ulises* merged with *Nova arte*, which had already run six issues. Directed by Enrique Záttara, *Nova arte* was also characterised by its interest in topics such as avant-garde theatre, the linguistic basis of structuralism, the connection between art, avant-garde, and love, and other subjects that represented a break with the tradition of left-wing parties. *Sitio*, on the other hand, focused on discourse analysis and psychoanalysis, as well as on



Fig. 4 Cover of *Xul* no. 1, October 1980.

Source: <https://ahira.com.ar/>.

Fig. 5 Cover of *Kosmos* no. 14, August-September 1983. Source: Editor Daniel Schapces' personal archive.



the importance of words for the art of writing between the lines. Its editors were the writers and intellectuals Ramón Alcalde, Héctor Grisafi, Luis Guscán, Jorge Jinkis, and Eduardo Grüner. The publication envisaged the act of reading as a meeting place where it is possible to engage in a close dialogue with those texts that helped disrupt the inertia imposed by dominant discourses. Subsequently, the issues published under democracy focused on the decline of the critical essay, developing an acute critique of what they dubbed 'Alfonsinist culture'. In these publications we find some clear examples of the influence exerted by the New Left, such as the attempt to leave behind the debate between aestheticism and realism, the recovery of discourse analysis, psychoanalysis, and the avant-garde.

Kosmos (1979–1986), directed by Daniel Schapces, found its own niche in the area of alternative journalism, as reflected in its motto [Fig. 5]. It was a type of

cultural press that privileged the sociological perspective and testimonial journalism, focused on human rights, the Malvinas War, and criticism of the establishment media, including discussions on unionism, universities, and articles dedicated to rock music. The support for human rights organisations played a prominent role in the magazine, expressed through articles that demanded trial and punishment for those responsible for genocide.

A final set of publications comprises magazines that included discussions about the transition to democracy, such as *Pie de p gina* [Footnote] (1982-1985) and *Praxis* (1983-1986). Appearing at the end of the dictatorship, these projects developed during the years of the post-dictatorship period to examine the relationship between culture and politics, including debates about the role of intellectuals in a context of democratic transition. These two publications mentioned clearly show that the utopian horizons envisaged during the transition were far from being univocal. While the former promoted the ideals of democracy, the latter supported the creation of a socialist state. *Pie de p gina*, directed by Alberto Castro, followed a tradition devoted to the recovery of a national and popular culture. While denouncing the crisis of the authoritarian project, it explored the possibility of building a cultural identity closely linked to the democratisation movement of Argentine society that would promote popular access to cultural production and consumption.

Praxis, edited by Emilio Cafassi after its second issue, sought to recover, as explicitly indicated by its name, the Marxist praxis and discuss the role of the intellectual in society. From a theoretical perspective and a Marxist programme, it aimed to contribute to the creation of a select group of revolutionary intellectuals, exploring the relationship between different disciplines and the class struggle within the framework of an ideological confrontation. The journal also examined the meaning of democracy for Marxism. The last issue is relevant because it explored the relationship between activism and everyday life, including an analysis of certain categories of traditional activism.

To conclude this classification, two points are worth noting. First, although this classification of areas of interest is meant to be as comprehensive as possible, it is far from being exhaustive. Second and more importantly, despite the wide variety of areas covered by these editorial proposals, all were united by the same spirit of confrontation with power.

Resistance fronts in the transition and subsequent developments

The cultural groups organised around the publishing projects of underground or countercultural magazines played an important role as a space for the exchange of ideas, allowing for the creation of a network of caring support. For all those who participated in these projects, the need to form a cohesive group was fundamental from the start. This need can be interpreted as a form of resistance to the fragmentation and prohibition of developing collective projects imposed by the rule of terror.

From the beginning, most groups, pushed by the need to exchange and articulate experiences, began to spontaneously establish links with other collectives. By 1979, a number of private study groups started to interact and create publishing networks. This represented a turning point, as the formation of networks allowed for a wider critical perspective on the military regime, thanks to the perception that each publishing endeavour was no longer an isolated phenomenon, but rather part of a broader network that provided support and helped generate a shared common identity. Contrary to the belief that the dictatorship exercised a monolithic power silencing all dissident voices, these experiences prove that a significant segment of society played an active role in creating a dynamic space for cultural exchange.

The Malvinas War and the period that immediately followed represented a watershed for countercultural magazines as they began to more openly question the established order, denouncing censorship and the foreign debt resulting from the military crisis. Timidly at first, they also began to suggest the idea of a return to democracy. It was also after the Malvinas War that they began to give more visibility to the struggle of human rights organisations.

During the transition to democracy, the main concern of these editorial projects was to give voice to a growing demand of society: the return to the democratic institutions in the context of a debate about its scope and programmes. Various resistance fronts that emerged in this period daringly embodied this programme of direct confrontation with the dictatorship for the reestablishment of democratic institutions. The analysis of one of these fronts in particular, the Movement for the Reconstruction and Development of National Culture,²⁰ reveals the changes that took place in this period. This anti-dictatorial movement appeared in 1981, held its first event in 1982, and dissolved in 1984, with a final major event, the Resistance Culture Week,²¹ held at the San Martín Cultural Centre. From its creation in the final years of the dictatorship, the collective sought to disseminate

²⁰ Movimiento por la reconstrucción y el desarrollo de la cultura nacional. This movement included musicians, painters, and intellectuals such as Ana Candiotti, Aída Carballo, Diana Dowek, León Gieco, Aimé Painé, Suma Paz, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, and Leda Valladares, among others. Representatives of cultural journalism included Andrés Cascioli (*Humor* magazine), Gabriel Levinas (*El Porteño* magazine), Manuel Amigo, and Jorge Brega (*Nudos* magazine).

²¹ Semana de la cultura de la resistencia.

symbolic productions, defend the rights of cultural producers, oppose commodification, preserve cultural heritage, promote debate, and strengthen experiences of Latin American integration. But its main objective was to build an anti-dictatorial front, encompassing various disciplines, such as painting, theatre, cultural magazines, popular music, etc. Once democracy was reestablished, the collective lost momentum and soon after disbanded.

The transition to the post-dictatorship period represented the establishment of a fragile democracy that was exposed to strong pressures from corporations and the military. This led to shifts in the way the symbolic and political spheres were articulated, and later, to a crisis in democratic expectations. Initially, with the return of democracy, several practices persisted. Heated debates took place, revealing the existence of political differences that had been dormant or postponed under dictatorship. However, these debates gradually lost vigour and their initial impulse faded. In this post-dictatorial context, after a few years, underground cultural life moved to other spaces, such as the punk universe, fanzines and performative experiences.

The return to democracy thus entailed changes in underground magazines and realignments among the cultural agents that produced them. As some publishing projects dissolved, some of their members chose to participate in new publications that sought to reach wider audiences. In other cases, their participants turned to other cultural and political projects. In the last years of 1980, this indicated that the space for dissident publications had lost its power to transform and challenge hegemony, as now, under new circumstances, the reorganisation and transformation of the public sphere had passed into the hands of new agents.

Conclusions

During the last Argentine dictatorship, countercultural magazines played a fundamental role in the country's cultural life. In a context of oppression and persecution, they coalesced society's capacity for expression and managed to rebuild in part the social bonds damaged by state terrorism. Their language, resources, and modes of communication took on a political dimension that enabled these projects to develop group-based approaches, tactics of care, containment, and creative strategies for producing texts and images that defied the limits of censorship and challenged authoritarian power.

In this period, various dissident practices merged to form resistance fronts, turning cultural opposition into one of the main features of the transition period.

Postponing controversies and debates, they concentrated all their efforts on forging bonds of solidarity. These initiatives allowed these resistance fronts to construct collective projects for intervention in the public sphere. These experiences of active cultural resistance aligned themselves with the demands of human rights organisations that denounced state terror and demanded the end of the dictatorship from a utopian perspective based mainly on the recovery of civil rights, and the return of democratic institutions. These cultural spaces for the exchange of ideas and political debate also played an important tactical role as they allowed for the development of common strategies in the final years of the dictatorship. In short, the vital role played by underground magazines spanned the three periods: dictatorship, transition, and first years of democracy.

However, in the post-dictatorship period, a few years after the return to democratic institutions, this cultural movement began to lose momentum as a result of the emergence of other initiatives in the public sphere, and several of these projects withered away, amid a period of disenchantment with the utopian horizon built around the idea of democracy. Some of the causes for this decline were the lack of serious discussions and the superficiality of the ongoing debates in the context of economic and political crisis. While at the beginning of Alfonsín's administration cultural initiatives regained momentum for a short time and political discussions multiplied, by the end of the decade the exhaustion of certain cultural projects, including underground magazines, was evident, in a context marked by a series of events that manifested the weakening and disillusionment of democratic expectations.

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the trajectory of Paula Ferreira, a pioneer of Portuguese underground culture and the first woman to own a comic bookshop and to create a fanzine in Portugal, situating her activity in the post-dictatorship period of the late 1970s. Adopting a socio-historical approach, the article explores how Ferreira established herself as a cultural agent within a field marked by gender inequalities and by the invisibility of underground culture and countercultural movements. Methodologically, the study draws on a semi-structured interview and a narrative reconstruction of Ferreira's trajectory, articulating individual memory with its wider social context. The article highlights the role of urban spaces, informal networks, and alternative cultural economies in the emergence of new forms of youth subjectivity in a country that had only recently emerged from a dictatorship and remained dominated by cultural traditionalism and a broader closure towards Europe and the world.

keywords

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Countercultural Splinters, Cultural Metamorphoses and Artistic Differences in Post-dictatorship Portugal

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All I need is a *Leitmotiv*¹

This article examines the work of Paula Ferreira, the first Portuguese woman to own a comic bookshop and to publish a fanzine in Portugal.² In the text, Ferreira's trajectory is situated within a complex patriarchal configuration composed of multiple agents who are politically and socially stratified, yet geographically interconnected. Ferreira's life-course is paradigmatic because it condenses key tensions that shaped the Portuguese cultural field in the late twentieth century. Her trajectory spans the transition from dictatorship to post-dictatorship and then democracy, reflecting how new possibilities for female cultural agency gradually emerged.

Ferreira's attitudes and ways of dealing with everyday life diverged from the dominant discourse, evident in an identity that was marked and solidified from an early age by multiculturalism and openness to the world, due to her privileged family background and economic and social conditions. Her experience exemplifies the do-it-yourself (DIY) ethos: she created spaces, networks and cultural products independently, often mobilising collective practices embedded in the underground scene, involving zinesters, musicians and political activists.

As part of this DIY ethos, the production of fanzines functioned, above all, as an alternative communicative form to the traditional press, which, after four decades of dictatorship, remained largely resistant to acknowledging women as autonomous subjects independent of the often oppressive and patriarchal male

¹ '*Leitmotiv* is a German word that means conductive motif. Conducting or characteristic motif, a frequently repeated theme in a score, associated with an idea, a character' (*Leitmotiv* 1980: 2).

² The publication of this article was supported by FCT — Foundation for Science and Technology within the scope of UIDB/00727/2020.

figure (Rich 1995). Zines and fanzines provide a privileged lens through which to observe how alternative cultural forms emerge, circulate and articulate forms of identity and resistance. Besides, these cultural expressions occupy a central place in the sociology of culture due to their close entanglement with specific social contexts, including media practices, artistic production, fan cultures, feminism and youth subcultures (Watson and Bennett 2020; Hodgkinson and Lincoln 2008).

In this article, the concept of post-dictatorship is used not only to refer to the years immediately after 1974, when the so-called Carnation Revolution marked the beginning of the end of the Portuguese dictatorial regime (the *Estado Novo*), but to a longer period in which the structural and cultural impacts of the regime continued to shape practices, mindsets and opportunities. Thus, although the focus is the late 1970s and early 1980s, these dynamics should be understood as deeply informed by the continuities of the *Estado Novo* and the social memory of the revolutionary process.

As informal and DIY ways of cultural production expanded during these years, new voices began to reshape the landscape of alternative culture. It was within this broader context that punk, and later post-punk, became key arenas for experimentation and expression, offering unprecedented visibility and creative autonomy. Although the earliest Portuguese punk bands of the late 1970s were short-lived, the formative movements of the Portuguese punk scene played a crucial role in shaping what would follow. From the mid-1980s, punk in Portugal began to consolidate, driven by growing exposure to international influences through records, fashion, magazines and media; by the symbolic importance of bands such as *Crise Total* [Total Crisis]; and by venues like *Rock Rendez Vous* (RRV), which regularly hosted international punk and post-punk events.

Portugal's entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1986 increased the number of live television performances and music videos; urbanisation and the proliferation of youth spaces in major cities also contributed to this development. A defining feature of this scene was punk songs written and performed in Portuguese, with lyrics that protested and challenged local socio-political figures and events. Such dynamics reveal how these early movements were instrumental in locally reappropriating the global punk ethos, demonstrating punk rock's hybrid nature as it was reshaped through Portugal's specific social and political contexts.

These voices found resonance in political movements of resistance (Guerra 2018b), such as the *União de Mulheres Alternativa e Resposta* (UMAR)³, that contested conventional constructions of femininity. Within this framework, Ferreira played a pioneering and subversive role in challenging male domination in the underground and post-punk domains, establishing her own modalities of participation and asserting an active position within the logics of fanzine production and distribution.

³ Alternative Women's Union and Response.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the re-evaluation of women's contributions to alternative and underground cultural scenes has become an increasingly pressing concern within cultural sociology and feminist media studies (Negra and Tasker 2014). Revisiting Ferreira's trajectory allows for an exploration not only of her individual agency, but also of the broader processes through which Portuguese women negotiated visibility and authorship in spaces historically dominated by men. By focusing on Ferreira's activities, ranging from comic book entrepreneurship to fanzine production, this article repositions her as a cultural mediator who anticipated later discussions on creative labour, gendered authorship and DIY cultural economies.

Revisiting the theoretical foundations of the sociology of interactions and identities, I draw upon Goffman (1982) and Elias (1993) to apprehend the multiple layers involved in the constitution of Ferreira's identity, from her social identity to her self-identity (Guerra 2025). It follows that practices, tastes and attitudes are not only constitutive elements in the process of identity construction, but also indispensable for society's comprehension of those identities. According to Hall and Du Gay (1996), identities represent positions occupied by individuals within specific discursive formations. Ferreira's process of identity construction may be understood as a symbolic resource, which both enabled and reflected society's gradual accommodation of emergent youth identities. Conversely, these identities themselves became symbolic resources insofar as they constituted a shared symbolic repertoire. In this regard, I underscore the 'inseparability between identity, self, and society, emphasising the reciprocal dynamic whereby the self is both nourished by the social context and contributes to its reproduction' (Guerra 2010: 664). This theoretical premise substantiates the methodological choice of employing semi-structured interviews to elucidate such interconnections, recognising that all action is contextually situated and that context requires action for its manifestation and consolidation.

Methodologically, I view semi-structured interviews as useful because they allow and facilitate understanding of a given topic and the procedures used to construct it. This point gains particular relevance because Portugal's socio-historical trajectory is characterised by irregular and contested processes of modernisation, and recognising these tensions is key to understanding the cultural and gendered dynamics that shaped Ferreira's experience. The narrative and the interview are both essential for such understanding, but also allow the clarification and identification of key mechanisms that engendered the meaning of Ferreira's life (Vieira 2014), even assuming a socio-anthropological perspective.

Thus, the approach woven here includes the narrative of Ferreira, told by the person who lived it in the most complete way possible, and consisting of her mem-

ories and what she felt was important (Guerra 2020b). The autobiography presented in this article can be framed as indirect, since the researcher played a role in making it, conducting the process in order to enable the comparison of data and perspectives. Even so, Ferreira's narrative provides us with an endogenous perspective in the sense that she clarifies her vision of herself. Parallel to this is a heterogeneous view, since Ferreira's life is also approached from the point of view of the Other. The combination of these visions makes it possible to define the place occupied by the individual in the social order (Atkinson 1998).

The article combines this personal approach with a mapping of the political and social contexts Ferreira traversed in order to understand the factors that contributed to the affirmation of her identity. Her case is significant because it encapsulates the tensions surrounding gender, cultural autonomy and DIY practices within Portugal's post-dictatorship in the late-twentieth-century and in the underground scene. Methodologically, it reconstructs and interprets her narrative (Guerra 2020b), establishing a dialogue with the multiple forms of resistance and affirmation (Hall and Jefferson 1975) that have shaped both her professional trajectory and her personal development.

A cultural and socio-historical contextualisation

The Portuguese dictatorial regime led by António de Oliveira Salazar consolidated its authority in the 1930s partly through ideological affinities with the German and Italian fascist regimes and through a discourse of restoring national and European order. Following World War II, Portugal entered a period of increasing political isolation, sustained internally by censorship, surveillance and a conservative social order that restricted women's autonomy and limited cultural experimentation. The Carnation Revolution of 25 April 1974, brought about by a military-led movement, dismantled this authoritarian structure and opened the way for democratisation, cultural liberalisation and new possibilities for participation in public life. These transformations form the socio-historical backdrop to Ferreira's trajectory: her work as the first woman to own a comic bookshop in Portugal emerged precisely at the intersection of expanding cultural freedoms, shifting gender norms and the rise of alternative cultural circuits in the post-authoritarian period.

Guerra and Quintela (2020) characterise Portuguese society at that time as conservative, embedded in paternalistic norms that predated Salazar but which were systematised and strategically exploited by the Estado Novo to legitimise its

authoritarian project. This ideology was based on persecution, the establishment of distrust and suspicion, and on the woman's role as a housewife and family carer, always dependent on her husband's authority. During the 1960s and early 1970s, Portugal saw a gradual massification of education, with compulsory schooling extended. Although these reforms remained modest compared with other European countries, they contributed to the emergence of a younger generation with broader cultural horizons.

The revolutionary years that followed the dictatorship altered the country's cultural landscape. Censorship was dismantled, new forms of artistic and political expression proliferated and urban centres became sites of experimentation. It was in this transformed environment, particularly in Lisbon, that punk fanzine culture took shape, drawing on the newly accessible channels of communication, the effervescence of youth scenes and the unprecedented freedom to publish, circulate and contest dominant cultural narratives. These processes of cultural opening were driven by several factors, including the growing circulation of Anglo-American popular music. The importation of records, the presence of pirate radio and the programming choices of broadcasters demonstrated that Portuguese youth were increasingly exposed to cultural forms that diverged from the regime-endorsed nationalist canon, symbolised most iconically by *fado*.

Gradually, radio programmes such as *Em Órbita* and *Rádio Clube Português* became influential spaces for disseminating new musical trends and expanding the cultural imagination of young listeners (Guerra 2025). Radio but also fanzines were essential for circulating other perspectives and for consolidating the significance of alternative media more broadly (Bailey, et al. 2007; Guerra 2019). In the context of a growing DIY and underground culture, fanzines in particular became key vehicles through which young people engaged with and developed alternative forms of expression.

Despite having emerged from the mid-1920s, fanzines gained significant expression between the 1970s and 1980s, with the emergence of the punk phenomenon in the United Kingdom and the United States. Typically homemade and crafted individually or collectively, these publications circulated in small networks, a pattern particularly visible in 1970s Portugal. Later on, the transformations that unfolded throughout the 1980s further diversified their themes and aesthetic approaches, reflecting broader shifts in Portuguese cultural life (Guerra 2020a) and the early emergence of postmodern sensibilities (Baía 2012).

Fanzines enabled visibility, nurtured affective bonds and helped to foster feelings of belonging among participants (Silva and Guerra 2015; Thompson 2004). Yet, as Atton (2006) argues, the fanzine is more than a subcultural practice: it constitutes a form of resistance and critique of massification itself. It is an alter-

native visual space in which individuals move and communicate to overcome the misrepresentations of traditional media (Guerra, et al. 2020; Hebdige 1979). As a medium of communication and a form of artistic expression, fanzines gave voice to the contesting fringes of society and contributed to the emergence of strong community dynamics (Force 2005; Guerra 2016). As Duncombe (1997) notes, the personal reflections and ethical positions embedded in these publications frequently carried political-social and ideological meanings, a point echoed by Dannus (2013: 25). This perspective is particularly useful for understanding Ferreira's creative work, as her engagement with fanzine culture operated not only as a form of expression but also as a means of social affirmation and cultural participation within emerging underground networks.

As well as being seen as the epitome of freedom of expression, fanzines were grounded in a strong DIY ethos (Triggs 2006). Rather than appealing to the masses, they offered an alternative to media forms perceived as industry controlled. Crucially, these practices were understood as DIY not only in the sense of autonomous cultural production, but also as a form of social organisation based on horizontal, non-hierarchical and participatory structures (Howley 2010). It is in this broader sense that the DIY ethos underpinned the networks, collaborations and collective initiatives that sustained these underground cultural scenes.

This aspect is even more relevant when we think about the career of Paula Ferreira, one of the creators of *Leitmotiv*, a fanzine that had only one issue and was produced within the core group of Ferreira's comic bookshop Mundo da Banda Desenhada [World of Comics]. This was a kind of alternative production (Guerra 2020a) since these creations facilitated active cultural participation. They were, and remain, a fundamental element of the concretisation of tastes, affinities, belonging, ideologies and lifestyles. In other words, they are material forms of symbolic depiction (Pine 2006): visual and textual constructions through which producers articulated identities, affiliations and forms of dissent.

And not just producers, but also readers. In fact, reading a fanzine is an affective experience in the sense that all the elements that make it up — from the text to the graphic materials and the sentimental ideology expressed in various forms — make the reader feel as if they are experiencing something more than a mere agglomeration of pages. It is in the embodiment of Simmel's 'felt value' (2005) that sociology can be a useful science for understanding iconicity and immersion in the arts, but also in DIY projects of various scales and natures. This problematic of iconicity and the meanings attached to fanzines are all the more valuable for the construction of our argument, especially with regard to Ferreira's story, but also in the production of *Leitmotiv*, since it reveals itself — materially — as a form of meaning-making (Watson and Bennett 2020).

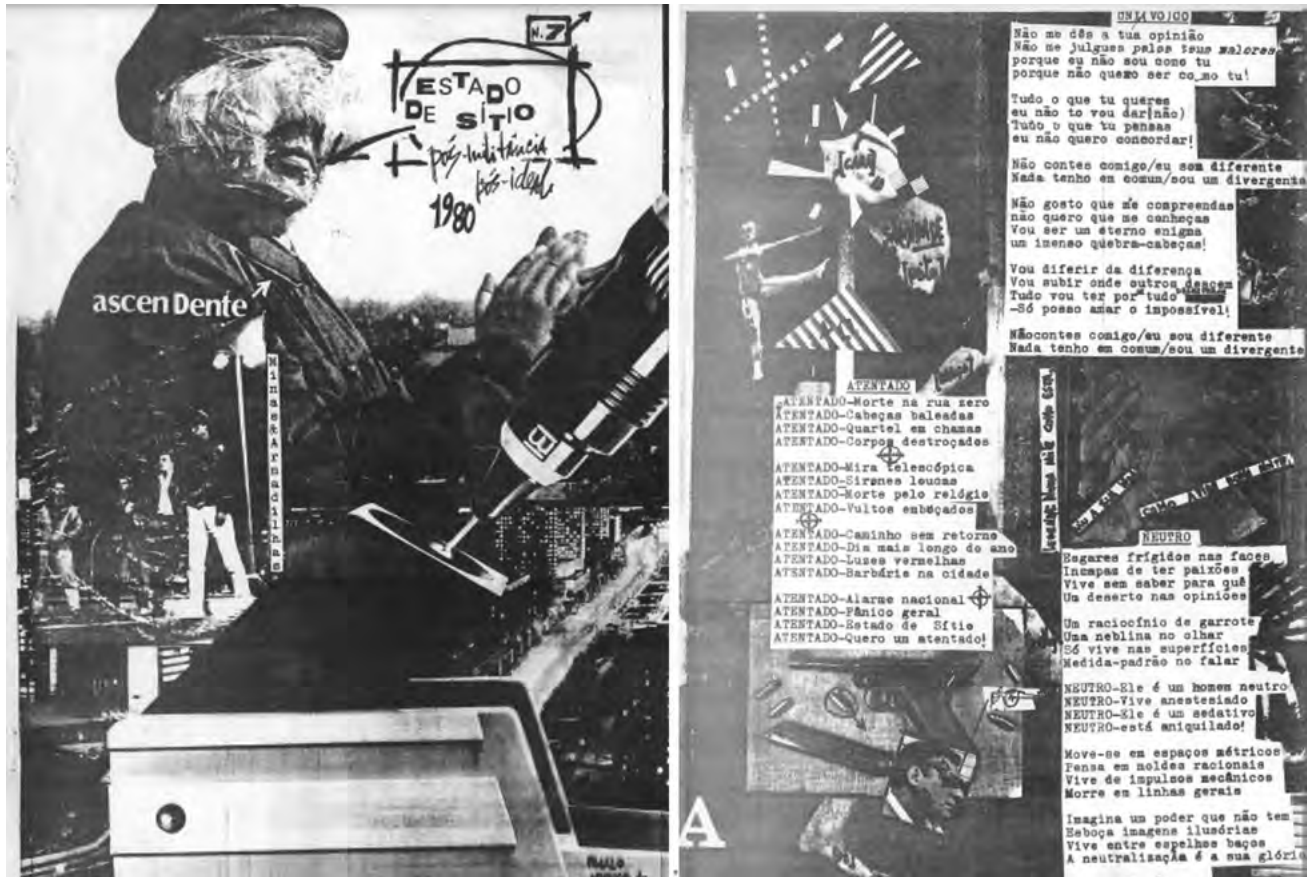


Fig. 1 Paulo Nunca Mais, ed. *Estado de Sítio*. *Pós-militância pós-ideal* [State of Emergency. Post-militancy post-ideal] (1980). Inside pages of the no. 7 (October). Image: courtesy of Paula Ferreira.

Fanzines such as *Desordem Total* [Total Disorder] (1978–1979) and *Estado de Sítio* [State of Emergency] (1978) [Fig. 1] are milestones and references for the socio-temporal period of post-dictatorial Portugal. In both cases, a strong DIY aesthetic orientation has always been present, characterised by a mix of techniques. While Portugal's punk movement was still in an embryonic state, similarities with Anglo-American fanzines could already be noted, especially regarding the language used — sarcastic in nature and always in line with the political and social reality experienced in Portugal and other countries. The references to bands through cut-and-paste images are also expressive of the tastes and aesthetics prevailing in this underground artistic field.

However, as previously noted, the significance of fanzines does not lie solely in their materiality, but also in the spaces in which they were created, read, and distributed. Hence the importance of sites such as Paula Ferreira's comic book-shop, which operated for ten years in the city of Lisbon (1977–1987). In addition to being a selling point for cult magazines, underground publications and national

fanzines, the shop became a meeting place for an alternative community, still far from the cosmopolitanism that would later emerge (Guerra and Quintela 2020). Moreover, it functioned as a space of resistance (Bennett 2018a; 2018b; Guerra 2018b) to a society emerging from forty years of dictatorship and entering a period of profound reconfiguration.

Paula Ferreira clashes with the future

Towards the end of its existence, Ferreira's bookshop was renamed Op when its owner also started to import contemporary art books and magazines (according to Ferreira, 'everything that is pleasing to the eye'⁴). A little earlier, in 1980, the core group associated with the shop launched the publication *Leitmotiv*, a single-issue author's edition. Before these milestones, Ferreira recalled how her interest in the punk scene began in 1977 when she met António Sérgio by chance in London.⁵ He was starting his radio show *Rotação* [Rotation] in the early days of Rádio Renascença. Ferreira also highlighted the role of Paulo Pedro Gonçalves and Faíscas⁶ [Sparks], her favourite Portuguese punk band. Thinking about the importance of places that lay between cosmopolitanism and provincialism, Ferreira highlighted the area around Avenida de Roma in Lisbon, particularly two locations: the disco Brown's⁷ and the café Tic Tac, where her friends, together with figures from the city's musical, cultural and artistic movement, such as António Variações,⁸ Zé da Guiné⁹ and Zé Pedro¹⁰ of Xutos & Pontapés, would congregate.

Ferreira said she viewed punk as a cultural movement of enormous importance in social terms — as important as the hippie movement. In fact, from her perspective, the main contribution of punk was precisely to have 'killed off' the hippie era — in other words, to have put an end to the inertia of the ideology of 'make peace, not war', the folklore of 'flower power' and the 'stars' of rock. In contrast, punk as a counterculture represented a cry of despair, its main contribution being its pure physical energy, which acted against any imposed system.

Ferreira was involved in some of the most significant and memorable experiences and practices of the emergence of punk and the DIY ethic and aesthetic in Lisbon. For example, in the summer of 1979, she and three friends (Paulo Nozolino,¹¹ Pedro Costa¹² and José Trabucho) organised a concert with the recently formed band Corpo Diplomático [Diplomatic Corps]¹³ [Fig. 2], which took place in the Sociedade de Alunos de Apolo [Pupils of Apollo Society]. In addition to some radio, newspaper and word-of-mouth publicity, Ferreira put up posters in

⁴ Unless stated otherwise, all direct quotations from Paula Ferreira come from the interview I conducted with her in Lisbon in February 2016. The interview lasted around three hours and was transcribed with informed consent before being subjected to categorical content analysis.

⁵ António Sérgio (1950–2009) was a famous radio host, radio producer, DJ, record editor and specialist who gave exposure to leading and innovative music artists in Portugal. From the late 1970s onward, he played the music of many international artists who were previously unknown in Portugal, putting local audiences in touch with them and with their music.

⁶ The first Portuguese punk-rock band, formed in 1977.

⁷ One of Lisbon's main nightclubs, where some of Portugal's most successful pop-rock bands debuted.

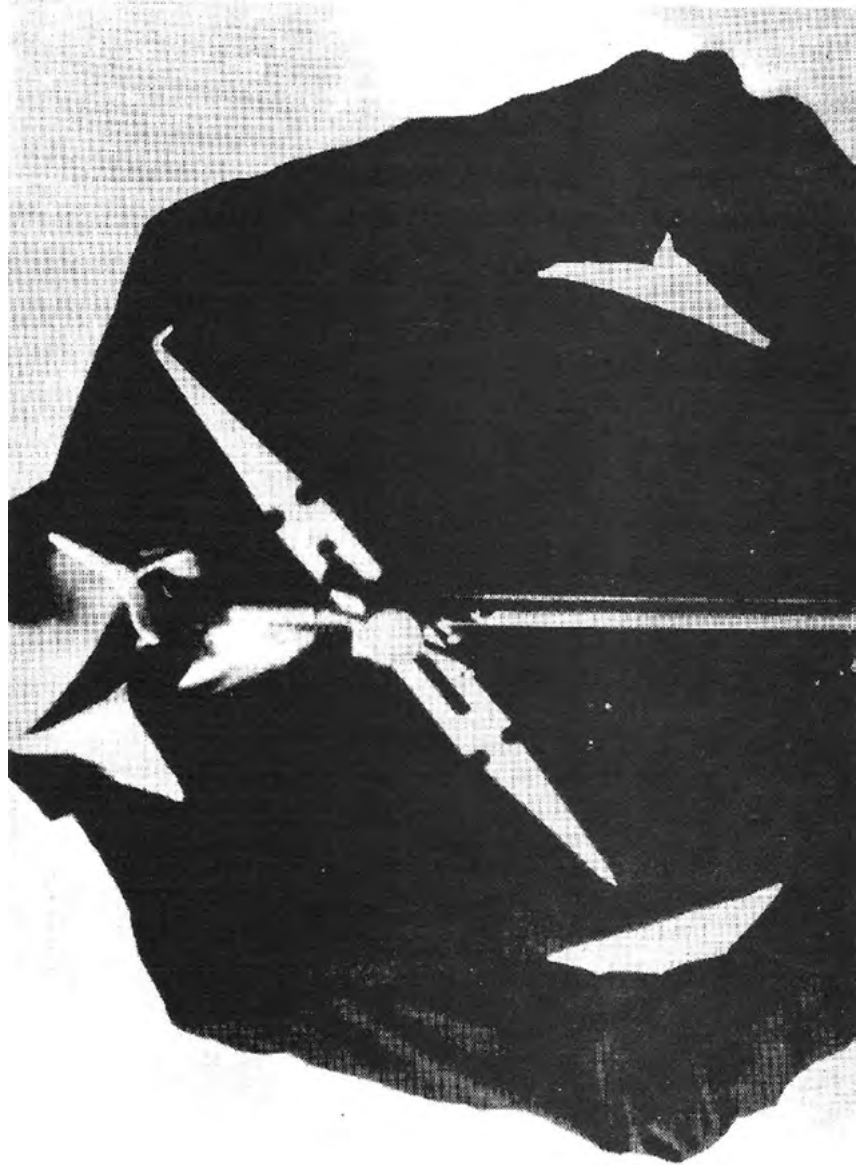
⁸ A Portuguese singer-songwriter of the 1980s, known for his eccentricity. *Variações* combined musical genres such as pop, rock, blues and *fado*.

⁹ An iconic figure of Lisbon nightlife in the 1980s. Born in Guinea-Bissau in 1959, Barbosa had a brief stint in the guerrilla war for liberation. He arrived in Lisbon in the 1970s, after the Carnation Revolution. At the end of that decade, he was one of the first to venture into the territory of bad reputation that was the Bairro Alto in Lisbon, opening the space Souk. Later, he embarked on the Rock House project (later renamed Juke Box), taking on various roles and participating in the emergence of Bairro Alto as the place *par excellence* of the cultural Lisbon of the 1980s.

¹⁰ José Pedro Amaro dos Santos Reis, known as Zé Pedro (Lisbon, 1956–2017), was a Portuguese musician, guitarist and founder of Xutos & Pontapés, perhaps the most relevant rock band in Portugal, formed in late 1978. He was a leading figure in contemporary Portuguese art, culture and society.

¹¹ Portuguese photographer Paulo Nozolino (1955) began his training when he attended the painting course at the Sociedade de Belas-Artes de Lisboa. In the mid-1970s, he entered the London College of Printing, from which he graduated with a higher diploma in creative photography.

Fig. 2 Poster with the logo (original photo) of Corpo Diplomático [Diplomatic Corps] at the Sociedade de Alunos de Apolo (Lisbon) in the summer of 1979. Image: courtesy of Paula Ferreira.



¹² Born in 1959, Pedro Costa is one of the leading names in Portuguese cinema and, together with Manoel de Oliveira, one of the Portuguese filmmakers with the greatest international expression.

¹³ The first Portuguese new wave band, formed in Lisbon in 1979. The band had a short career, releasing only two albums.

the city with her troupe and distributed many more. During the concert, a non-stop slide show of images handpicked and assembled by two of the members of the organisation was projected on each side of the stage. This performance logic is crucial to understanding a little of the country's social configuration, particularly that Portuguese punk is an exclusively DIY phenomenon. In fact, the lack of publishers interested in hiring Portuguese punk bands made these kinds of initiatives essential (Guerra 2017; 2018b; 2025).

The answer was DIY, something evident both in amateur live concert recordings and in cassette copies that passed from hand to hand. Similarly, no punk fashion existed that was marketable and available: it was only in the 1980s that the first punk fashion designers arrived in Portugal (Guerra 2025). This led Ferreira to expand into the world of fashion and design, intensifying the logic of female participation in subcultural environments. For example, she told us that she designed the clothes of the Heróis do Mar [Heroes of the Ocean]¹⁴ for the videoclip of *Brava Dança dos Heróis* [Brave Dance of Heroes] [Fig. 3]. In 1982, the album *Amor* [Love] came out with a photograph of Paulo Nozolino on the cover. Some of these projects were plotted, produced and realised from the bookshop [Fig. 4], in the Olivais house¹⁵ or behind the wheel of a Ford Transit van, which she drove ‘with her nerves on edge. It was all for us’.

All these examples demonstrate that the evolution of the Portuguese punk scene is centred on interrelationships and friendship networks, as well as on production microcircuits of bands, publishers and spaces. It was during this process of transformation and scene formation in the 1980s that the combination of punk and post-punk evolved, largely due to the country’s growing openness to new records, new clothes, magazines and news, but also due to the importance of bands such as *Crise Total*.¹⁶

Based on Ferreira’s work [Fig. 5] and speech, we cannot miss the link with Alison Rice’s (2020) contributions. For this author, activism does not only mean written works or the use of the word, but a commitment to, and an involvement with, the acts of doing differently or being different that go beyond the text. Ferreira’s opposition to, and protests against, a retrograde, misogynistic and macho society began early, and contested the usual experiences of a woman living in a society with these characteristics. She became a pioneer and can indeed be seen as a feminist activist, as she provided other women with valuable business insight. Ferreira stated that her immediate circle maintained a commitment to a certain rebellious attitude of non-alignment and individual affirmation.

Ferreira described herself as having a rebellious mentality: ‘Maybe I was born punk!’ She also stated that she had ‘lived a thousand lives’ with the punk movement and with attitude, and in this sense, she remembered being a ‘happy rebel’ — a ‘rebel by vocation’. Ferreira mentioned that in Lisbon she was part of a privileged collective that was permanently connected to the current: ‘our inspiration came from abroad — the United States and England — but only some of us could travel. Afterwards, the information was processed, but no secrets were kept.’ In fact, her stable economic situation afforded her privileged access to cultural resources, including music, cinema and literature. In Portugal, from childhood, she listened carefully to records in the cellar of the *Discoteca do Carmo*¹⁷ [Carmo Disco],

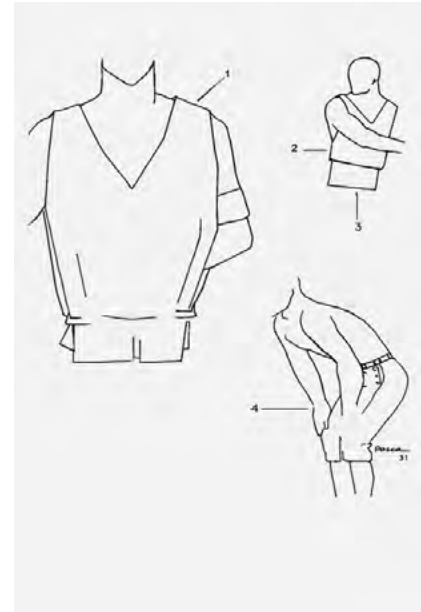


Fig. 3 Sketches of the Heróis do Mar [Heroes of the Ocean] costumes made by Ferreira in 1981. Image: courtesy of Paula Ferreira.

¹⁴ A Portuguese pop-rock band formed in 1981. The band’s image was marked by a nationalist and neoliberal aesthetic. Its songs reflected the glorification of Portugal’s past, which was controversial at the time.

¹⁵ A residential neighbourhood of historic character that was once the destination of the bourgeoisie and industry.

¹⁶ A punk group formed in 1983.

¹⁷ The disco opened its doors in 1957 on Rua do Carmo, in Lisbon. It was intended to disseminate the main musical releases arriving in Lisbon from abroad.



Fig. 4 Paula Ferreira at the Mundo da Banda Desenhada bookshop, and the bookshop's façade in 1977. Image: courtesy of Paula Ferreira.



Fig. 5 *Leitmotiv. Aventuras, Motins, Actualidades Filmadas, Duas Entrevistas e...* Cover of the first issue (May 1980). Lisboa: O Mundo da Banda Desenhada. Image: courtesy of Paula Ferreira.

owned by a friend of her father; and, at the age of 16, she started travelling alone frequently, mainly to London.

According to Ferreira, the opening of the Mundo da Banda Desenhada comic bookshop when she was 23 was a result of her willingness to do things differently. The bookshop contained countless imported books related to art — comics, photography, graphic arts, painting, music, architecture and design — as well as pirated fanzines and all the ‘fringe’ publications. Examples of how the new wave materialised in the graphic and visual arts were also to be found in the bookshop. In fact, the very choice of the name ‘Banda Desenhada’ is contestatory and of a historical and social nature, referring to the satirical drawings that proliferated with the 1969 academic crisis (Guerra 2018a), a turning point marked by student unrest and a heightened production of political satire.

Ferreira perceived that, under an oppressive and misinformed cultural climate, comics were often viewed in simplistic terms — either as children’s entertainment, exemplified by *Uncle Scrooge*, or as illicit pornography — even though a broader comic culture did exist at the time, as she had learned from her travels. At the age of 21, Ferreira went to Brussels, where she attended a general course in cinema and photography at the Institut des Arts de Diffusion (IAD), while working menial jobs to earn a living. Returning to Portugal after a year without having finished the course, she brought back with her the idea of opening a comic bookshop in Lisbon, infected by the Franco-Belgian comic book boom.

The space she had available — a small, empty warehouse lent by her father — soon became a meeting place. The bookshop was also frequently used as a laboratory for ideas, as well as a place to rehearse music and to socialise with friends behind closed doors. The world of comics is a form of expression that defines an identity, a vision, providing a link between different ways of reading the world, such as cinema, painting, photography, the visual arts, music, architecture and design. But in the context of post-revolutionary Portugal, dedicating oneself to the production and dissemination of comics and fanzines also reflected an attitude of defiance and resistance.

This resistance was visible in Ferreira’s attitudes and everyday practices, reflecting an identity shaped and consolidated by multiculturalism and openness to the world from an early age, due to a privileged family background and economic and social conditions. This experience and attitude towards life allows us to argue that her feminist involvement aligned with a decolonial feminism that recognised the multidimensionality of oppression (Sommers 2001) and refuses to separate race, sexuality and class into mutually exclusive categories (Rice 2020). This openness was reflected in her attitude of being completely anti-system and anti-normative towards Portuguese society:

My way of dealing with clients here and with foreign publishers was quite informal. When I started I was only 23 years old. I was relaxed (naïve?) and not at all prejudiced about my status as owner and manager. At the time, in Portugal, being a manager was a status reserved for older people with experience in commerce. In my case it was all empirical. Since I was sixteen travelling around Europe and poking my nose into alternative clothes and music shops, second-hand bookshops and street markets, I was naturally used to another pulse.

Portuguese culture in the 1980s was marked by a real cultural revolution, in the sense that numerous Portuguese artists felt it was the ideal time to break with the dominant culture, thus showing themselves to be more receptive to, and influenced by, postmodernity (Guerra 2025; Nogueira 2002). According to Pinharanda (1995: 615), in the 1980s ‘there was a generalised creative euphoria in architecture, design, photography, fashion and music, a “lust for life” capable of recalling the liberation of customs only timidly felt in Portugal in the 1960s’.

During that time, Ferreira wrote a letter to the headquarters of *Interview* magazine, addressing it to Andy Warhol. According to her, Warhol did not reply personally but asked someone on his team to respond to the question she had sent him. She also placed an order for three copies of the *Tulsa* photography book directly from the author, Larry Clark, asking him to please send them autographed. He sent her the books by boat, but they were not autographed. A few years later, he would direct the films *Kids*, *Ken Park* and many others.

Despite this ‘lust for life’, the reality was that Paula Ferreira had to overcome many barriers to make her business sustainable. Although the comic bookshop closed in 1987, Ferreira has kept the space at no. 49 on the Escadinhas do Duque as her place of work in other areas:

In Lisbon I had the space and the possibility to be a pioneer in Portugal where small import businesses were almost non-existent because the final product was expensive and went through a lengthy and costly process that involved clearing customs and paying customs fees and brokers. In addition, in the case of books, there was also the book exchange rate, which was higher than the currency exchange rate. Orders coming from America were subject to additional taxes because they went direct to the Netherlands, which was the warehouse for Europe. In addition, they took months to arrive because they came by boat. All this was obviously reflected in the final price — a huge difference between the cover price and the retail price in the bookshop. It was a non-business.

She also recalled the difficulties of keeping the business running, especially as a woman:

There was no organised accounting. The money that came in had to be enough for everything. My father helped with the health insurance contributions, and sometimes I even had to ask him for back-up for an order. But as I didn't pay rent and didn't have any employees, I managed to cut down on the fixed expenses as much as possible. There was always some friend who needed to work temporarily because he was studying or unemployed. I paid by the hour and never more than two hours a day. I couldn't afford any more. I opened the bookshop at 11 a.m. and started by sweeping the pavement and cleaning the window glass. I didn't have time to close.

When we consider how youth and gender intersect through physical media such as magazines, debates or special issues, these relationships appear far more complex than they might initially seem (Guerra 2020c). As I have already mentioned, between the 1970s and 1980s, despite the exponential increase in studies on subcultures, women were part of a hidden face (LeBlanc 2005). In this context, Angela McRobbie (2009) emerged with the aim of criticising this lack of empirical and theoretical support for the role played by women in the subcultural field. McRobbie was a pioneer in subcultural studies, just as Ferreira was a pioneer in Portugal, particularly with regard to her comic bookshop, but also to the edition of the fanzine *Leitmotiv*.

***Leitmotiv* and gendered editing practices**

A few years after opening the comic bookshop, Paula Ferreira embarked on another short-lived, though no less significant, project: the publication of the fanzine *Leitmotiv*. The cover of the fanzine was designed by Ferreira, who, as we have already observed, had an aptitude for design. In this sense, I highlight that the aesthetic perception of the works (DeNora 2000; Lash 2016) creates forms of imaginary enchantment that essentially translate into the affective experience of reading a fanzine. Ferreira was also responsible for the 'adventures' section — and, of course, the fanzine bore the imprint of Ferreira's bookshop and was disseminated there.

Returning to the previous issue of the invisibility of women, McRobbie (2009) states that the participation of women in the subcultural field was scarce because they had less money than men. Ferreira occupied an atypical position within the

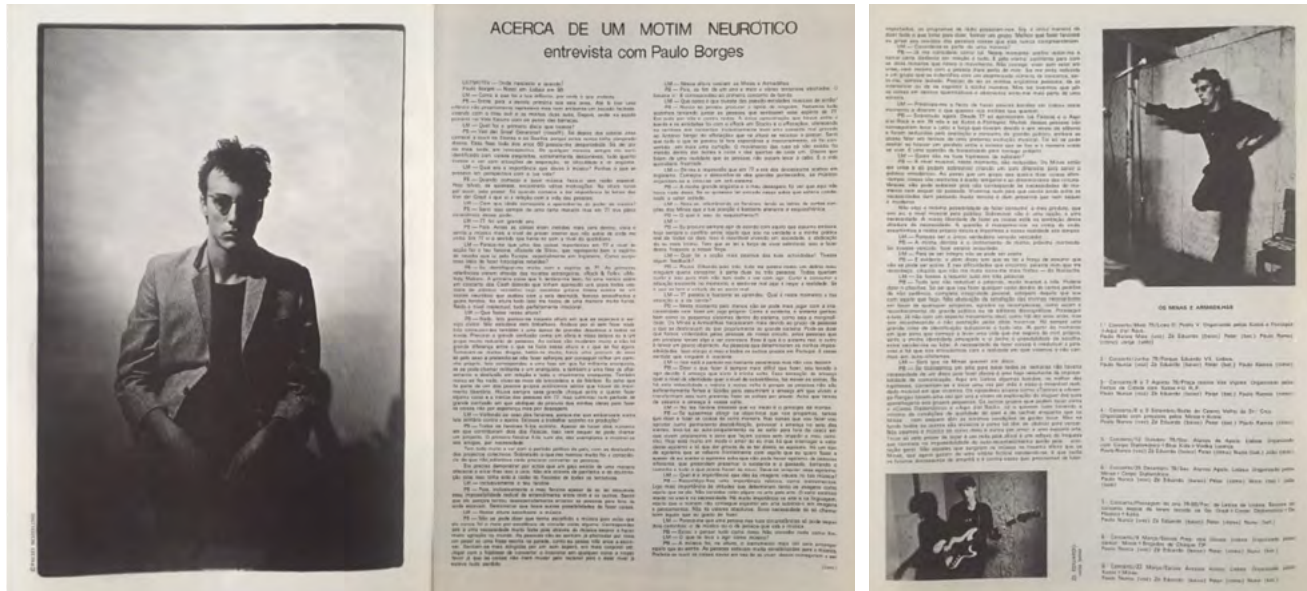


Fig. 6 'Acerca de um Motim Neurótico. Entrevista com Paulo Borges', *Leitmotiv* 1, 1980. Image: courtesy of Paula Ferreira.

subcultural context. Unlike the majority of women, who were excluded from participation due to financial and educational constraints, her upper-class Lisbon background — her father was an economist, and she completed twelve years of schooling — afforded her opportunities that were not widely available to women at the time (Bergen 2019). She studied fine arts and photography, which placed her outside the common educational trajectories of young Portuguese women at the time.

This background shaped the fanzine in two distinct ways. First, photography assumed a central role in the publication, reflecting her formal training. Second, it displayed her cultural capital, evident in her interview with Paulo Borges, a member of one of her favourite bands, Minas e Armadilhas [Mines and Traps] [Fig. 6]. As Fetterley (1978) and Long (2003), working in the field of critical theories of feminism, communities and masculinities, state, reading fanzines such as *Leitmotiv* leads to the development of a strong self-knowledge (Vieira 2014), as well as putting women on alert regarding the lived world, their social position and their status. Thus, similar to what Thurston Moore writes about Patti Smith, Ferreira can be seen as a significant figure, since she informed the punk movement not only as a woman, but also as a writer and artist (Letts 2005).

In the interview with Borges, several paradigmatic and controversial points were addressed, reflecting the theoretical contributions of the fanzine, both as a means of dissemination of a musical taste and as a way of promoting political ideologies and expressing resistance against normativity and the mainstream (McKay 1998).

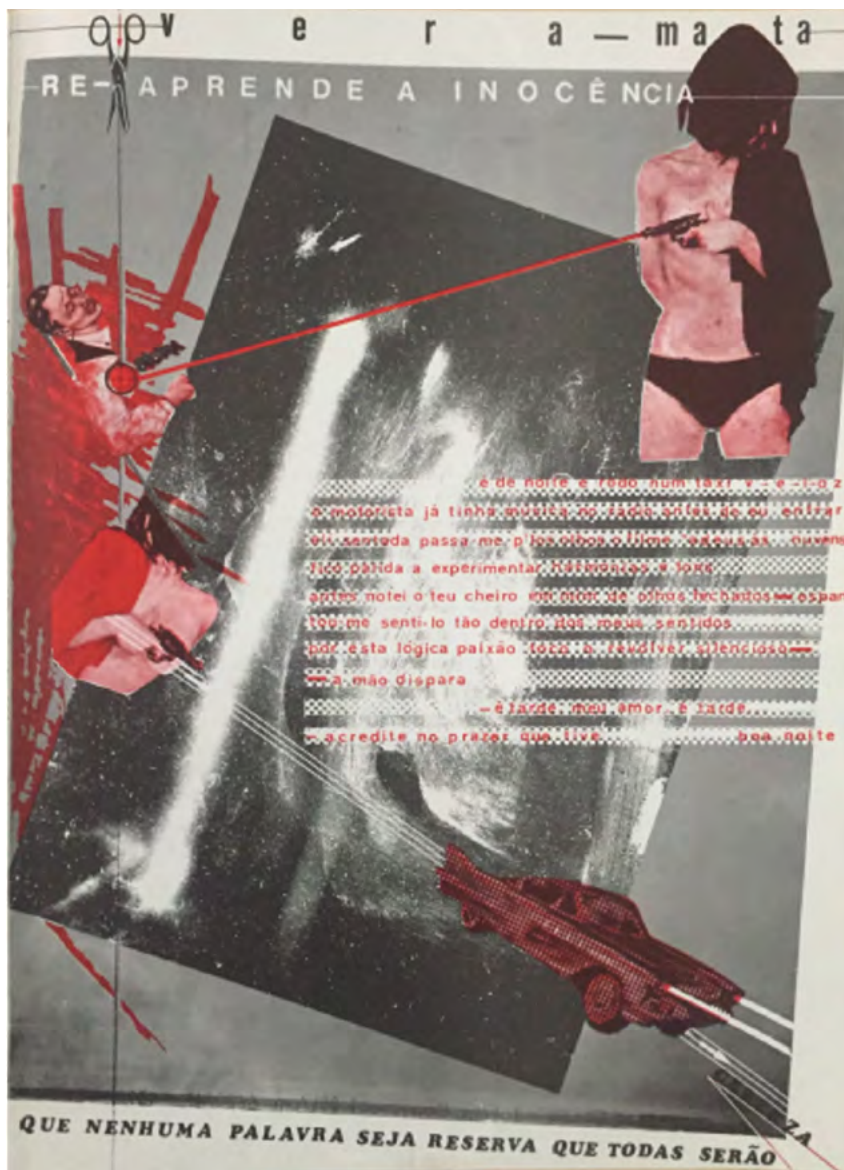


Fig. 7 'Vera Mata', *Leitmotiv 1*, 1980.
Image: courtesy of Paula Ferreira.

The fanzine is an expression of a social and collective identity, while fostering and giving rise to cultural and class confrontations — the so-called ‘third cultures’ (Vieira 2014). In Ferreira’s fanzine, this becomes evident in the way she mobilises her photographic training and cultural networks, positioning herself within a scene typically dominated by working-class male participants. During the interview, Paulo Borges reveals several of the points discussed in this article, on issues ranging from the Anglo-American influence on the punk aesthetic (Guerra 2025):

I identified very much with the spirit of '77. The first references came through foreign magazines: *Rock & Folk*, *Melody Maker*. The first thing I read, I remember well, was a news article about a Clash concert saying that some guys dressed in red plastic appeared, whose vocalist shouted out a sentence about a neurotic riot that ended up with the room being destroyed (Borges 1980: 5).

Even in the interview with António Sérgio (perhaps one of the main people responsible for the dissemination of Anglo-American and punk culture in Portugal), themes that mark the history of Portugal are addressed, mainly regarding pirate radio (Guerra 2019). In this sense, Ferreira's actions show that she did not want to establish herself within a rising underground scene (Schilt 2003); on the contrary, she intended (and managed) to create her own scene (Smith 2010), just like her idol, António Sérgio, and doing so not only through discourse, but also via a plastic and creative intervention, as articulated in *Leitmotiv*.

The cut-and-paste aesthetic references that can be found in the fanzine (Guerra 2025; Guerra and Quintela 2020) are latent as the main element of DIY culture, notable due to their aesthetic and linguistic aggressiveness, encouraging reflection but also denunciation. Bennett (2018a; 2018b) highlights how youth and the creative process are interconnected, explaining how this relationship fosters an ethos rooted in punk logic. Taking one of the pages of *Leitmotiv* as a starting point [Fig. 7], I ascertain that here DIY culture has undergone several changes, becoming involved with politics and several cultural practices. However, DIY is still an essential element for understanding culture and artistic production within a given social context. The questions of the body, sexuality, femininity and masculinity are all expressed in the image, somewhat disruptive in that social and temporal context (Vitak 2012).

Besides functioning as a social product, fanzines also have the ability to encourage social change, in the sense that they highlight the tiniest anti-hegemonic possibilities. Keeping this premise in mind, we find in Ferreira's trajectory, and particularly in *Leitmotiv*, the possibility of being transported to the capital at that time. Fanzines are a strong element of demarcation of experiences and spatialities in the sense that, like identities (Guerra, 2010; 2018b), they cannot be produced without the influence of a certain context. On another page of the fanzine, below a map of Lisbon marked with strong red lines, we read the following:

Report: nothing special to report in the morning hours. Lunch. 11.15 am. A large number of people come to the cafés. The first contacts of the afternoon are made. Shoes are pressed, newspapers are bought, an occupation is sought. 5 pm. The most determined leave. The old people take their places. Small groups of

people stand out in the street. 19.30. A patrol car passes by. The zigzagging begins. The first pinball bowls are launched. Five sticks are asked for. Night falls. 20.30: cafés empty. Concentration on beer halls, burger joints. Finish re-reading the newspaper. 9.30 pm. Neons and shop windows alight (Carvalho 1980: 14).

The fanzine also makes a reference to the Anglo-American context of influence. A kind of tragic romance is written in red and in an unmistakable typewriter font, the expression of Ferreira's creative self (Eisler and Montuori 2007). The fanzine even ends with a reference to the growing cosmopolitanism that plagued the galloping modernisation process, with a reference to a Chevrolet car and a Polaroid photograph of New York [Fig. 8]. Both the text and the Polaroid photograph belong to Ferreira — to her memories.

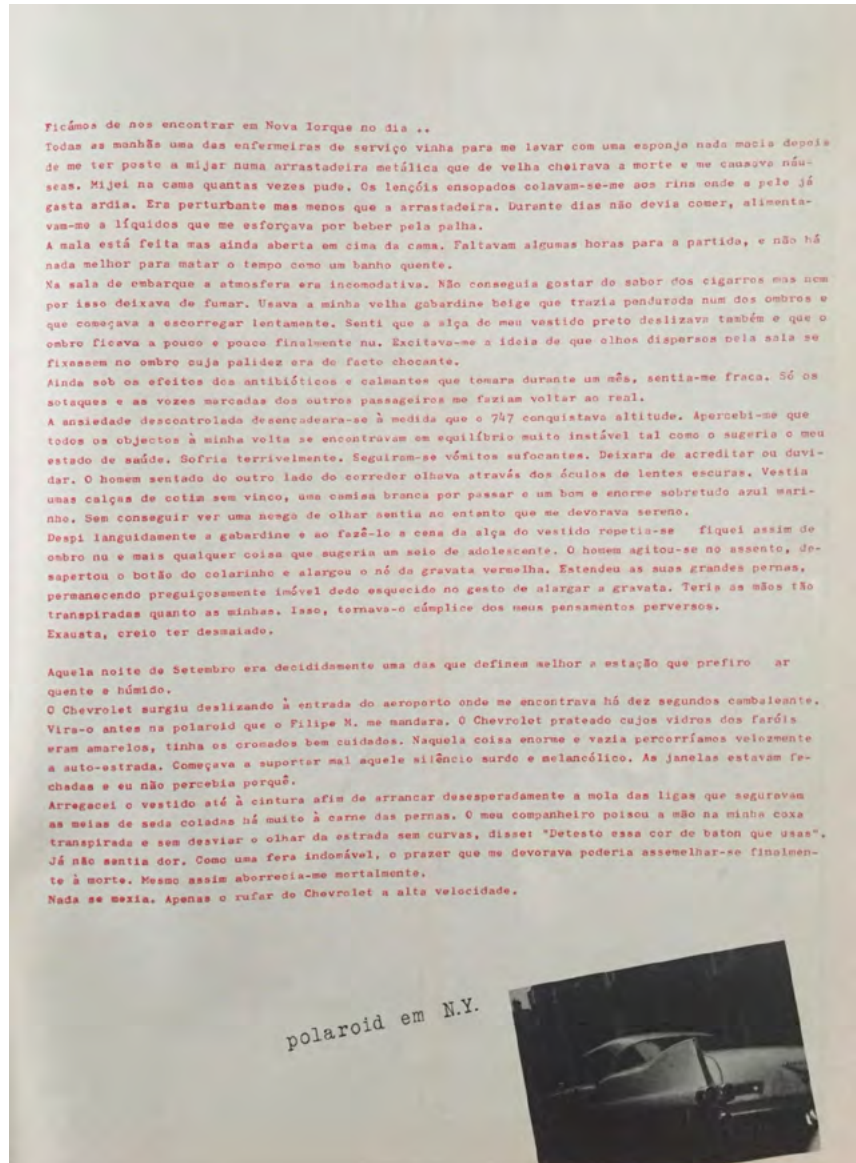
Ferreira's accounts of her 'adventures' offer insight into how femininity was being negotiated and expressed within subcultural contexts. Several aspects of her self-presentation — autonomy, humour, self-awareness and a refusal of passive femininity — resonate with themes later central to post-feminist theory (Gill 2007). These resonances allow us to consider her narrative as an early site where new forms of gendered agency were being articulated. Post-feminist analyses have highlighted how femininity in media culture has increasingly been associated with youth, heterosexuality, whiteness and middle-class, cisgender norms (Butler 2013; Gill 2017). Yet this framework is not without limitations. As McRobbie (2009) notes, post-feminism often struggles to account for broader social and political dynamics, while O'Neill (2018) argues that it has become permeable to neoliberal logics that frame women's experiences as equivalent to those of men.

While these debates are highly relevant in the twenty-first century, they raise an important question for Ferreira's historical moment: to what extent were such notions of gendered agency and expressive freedom available or even thinkable in the late twentieth century? It is in this context that Ferreira's own writing becomes especially illuminating. She describes her 'adventures' in the following terms:

Every morning one of the nurses on duty came to wash me with a not-so-soft sponge after having me piss in a metal bedpan that smelt of death and made me nauseous. I pissed the bed as many times as I could. The soaked sheets stuck to my kidneys, where the already worn skin burned (Ferreira 1980: 17).

We are thus faced with an emerging tension between beauty and authenticity, patterns and oppositions. Both paradigms are resolved by personal choices on

Fig. 8 'Aventuras de Paula Ferreira',
Leitmotiv 1, 1980. Image: courtesy
of Paula Ferreira.



Ferreira's part, giving rise to a mix of individuality and authenticity (Chen and Kanai 2021), but never obeying what would be hegemonically attractive (Bergen 2019). Authenticity was therefore legitimised by being attached to a body that did not correspond to normative and socially imposed beauty. Ferreira's own authenticity was deployed as a strategy to cultivate a sense of common aspiration for all those who did not fit the norm.

Final remarks

Throughout both the interview with Ferreira and her narrative, the artistic sensibilities and the demands that guided the events of the 1970s and 1980s in Portugal become evident (Guerra 2020a). Women like Ferreira are currently seen as the representation of a deformalisation and liberalisation of the values of Portuguese society (Guerra 2018a). In this way, Ferreira's stance, marked by intellectual openness and a break with established norms, reflects Portugal's gradual alignment with broader European forms of cosmopolitanism, which had long circulated in Anglo-American and other Western European contexts but reached Portugal later due to the constraints of the authoritarian regime.

The punk connection to fanzines cannot be reduced to their existence in the punk context: fanzines existed from the beginning of the twentieth century and were the pioneers of independent publications. The fanzine corresponds to the creation of a community of interest and taste, acting as a kind of handmade predecessor of contemporary social networks. It is also assumed as a practice and as an object that could promote and cement affective relationships (Watson and Bennett 2020). Indeed, since the 1970s, fanzines such as *Leitmotiv* became pioneers in Portugal, albeit confined to the city of Lisbon, offering a detailed, lived vision of a city marked by dualities.

It was within these dualities that Ferreira asserted herself and stood out within a subculture, and a society, in which women still remained 'less important' in relation to men. Thus, in the context of post-feminist discourses (Gill 2007; 2017; McRobbie 2009), Ferreira and her practices and actions can be seen from the point of view of authenticity in the sense that — keeping the DIY ethos in mind — they were associated with an anti-mainstream and anti-normative logic, creating and promoting new forms of femininity and action within Portugal's evolving cultural landscape.

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RESUMO

O presente artigo propõe-se analisar a obra da artista portuguesa Ana Vidigal, focando particularmente os seus livros de artista, que funcionam como veículo para trabalhar a articulação de memórias individuais e coletivas da ditadura em Portugal. Nesse sentido, discutir-se-á a forma como Vidigal utiliza técnicas de sobreposição e recoleção de fragmentos diversos, misturando memória pessoal, familiar, política e cultural, para criar composições estéticas críticas sobre a ditadura, a guerra colonial e a condição da mulher, interpretando o seu processo criativo à luz de estudos sobre memória cultural e arquivo e explorando a ideia de memória produtiva e o papel do arquivo como ruína que se reconfigura através da prática artística. As reflexões de autores como Gilles Deleuze e Félix Guattari, Andreas Huyssen, Marianne Hirsch e Aleida Assmann, entre outros, são aqui convocadas para evidenciar o potencial do livro de artista como um espaço de diálogo entre passado e presente.

ABSTRACT

This article seeks to analyse the work of the Portuguese artist Ana Vidigal, focusing particularly on her artist's books, which serve as a vehicle for working on the articulation of individual and collective memories of the dictatorship in Portugal. In this sense, we will discuss how Vidigal uses techniques of collecting and overlaying various fragments, mixing personal, family, political, and cultural memory to create critical aesthetic compositions about the dictatorship, the colonial war, and the condition of women. Interpreting her creative process from the perspective of studies on cultural memory and archive we explore the idea of productive memory and the role of archives as ruins that are reconfigured through artistic practice. The reflections of authors such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Andreas Huyssen, Marianne Hirsch, and Aleida Assmann, among others, are called upon here to highlight the potential of the artist's book as a space for dialogue between past and present.

palavras-chave

ANA VIDIGAL
RUÍNA
MEMÓRIA
PÓS-DITADURA
PORTUGAL
LIVROS DE ARTISTA

keywords

ANA VIDIGAL
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A Memória como Ruína, a Ruína da Memória: (Re)Configurações dos Resquícios de uma Ditadura nos Livros de Artista de Ana Vidigal

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Introdução

Fortemente marcada pela memória da ditadura e do pós-ditadura, e pelo confronto com o seu lastro na sociedade portuguesa, a obra de Ana Vidigal (Lisboa, 1960) encontra nos livros de artista um veículo para trabalhar um conjunto de memórias que se estendem do individual para o coletivo.¹ Esta prática artística ‘menor’, no sentido em que convoca ‘o agenciamento coletivo da enunciação’ (Deleuze e Guattari 2002: 41), estrutura-se a partir de um conjunto imprevisível e infinito de ‘pequenas coisas’ que emergem da vivência do quotidiano.

Sendo pintora, Ana Vidigal (que se formou no curso de Pintura pela Faculdade de Belas Artes de Lisboa em 1984) desde cedo desenvolveu aquilo a que chamou o seu ‘trabalho paralelo’, no qual se insere a sua prática no território dos livros de artista. Através da sobreposição de várias técnicas, como a colagem, a escrita ou o desenho, a artista recupera e reenquadra nestas obras elementos da(s) memória(s) pessoal, familiar, política e cultural criados a partir de uma perspetiva crítica das dinâmicas da nação colonizadora, problematizando a ideia do fim da ditadura, ou um pós-ditadura, a seguir à Revolução de Abril de 1974, que pôs termos a uma ditadura de quase cinco décadas (1933–1974) gizada por António de Oliveira Salazar. Destas composições emergem poderosas construções estéticas e críticas em torno de questões como o colonialismo e a condição da mulher na sociedade, entre muitos outros temas, dos quais se destaca também a Guerra Colonial (1961–1974),

¹ Este trabalho foi financiado através de fundos nacionais pela FCT — Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P., através do projeto UID/00305/2025 e do projeto individual 10.54499/2021.00235.CEECIND/CP1664/CT0029.

travada pelo exército português contra os movimentos de libertação em países como Angola, Moçambique e Guiné-Bissau.

Esta metodologia ganha particular ímpeto nos seus livros de artista, expandindo o modelo do diário e de (re)coleção para lá da dimensão familiar e pessoal. A própria Ana Vidigal refere que muitas das suas obras, baseadas nas suas próprias impressões e vivências, têm sempre o potencial de desencadear nos outros algo diferente, ligado às suas próprias experiências. Diríamos, então, que aquilo a que o público acede é algo da ordem do coletivo, numa síntese entre memórias e imaginário. Como nota Margarida Calafate Ribeiro:

Assim, se podemos dizer que existe hoje em Portugal uma memória oficial em relação ao 25 de Abril de 1974, que é transmitida às gerações seguintes, o mesmo não se pode dizer em relação à herança colonial que esta revolução em si trazia. Dois acontecimentos passados, duas heranças que nos constituem como portugueses do século XXI: uma, ficou do lado do que devemos lembrar, o lado da comemoração para que não esqueçamos a luta contra a ditadura e a alegria da liberdade; outra, ficou do lado do que devemos esquecer, o lado do luto a medo pronunciado, não reconhecido publicamente, resultado de uma paz obtida pelo silêncio. Sabemos que o silêncio é essencial à memória e à história (Ribeiro 2020: 5).

Neste sentido, focar-nos-emos concretamente em alguns dos livros de artista de Ana Vidigal, realizados entre 2016 e 2022, que resulta de um processo híbrido que inclui a (re)coleção de fragmentos vários, materiais e imateriais, que remontam às memórias de uma ditadura. Esses fragmentos configuram-se como memórias do passado, mas reconfiguram-se como ruína de si próprios e desse passado que representam, antecipando o potencial de criar um imaginário livre de amarras ideológicas que permanecem operativas ainda no presente. Neste artigo, atentaremos nesse processo à luz de reflexões sobre memória cultural e as releituras da História a partir de um arquivo material.

Memória, arquivo, ruína

A omnipresença da memória na política e na cultura tem vindo a marcar as últimas décadas, e nenhum campo será porventura mais prolífico para a análise desta viragem, nos antípodas da esperança no ‘futuro’ e dos ‘futurismos’ do início do século XX, do que a produção artística. Tomamos aqui produção artística como um termo geral que consegue abarcar a amplitude da multiplicidade de cruzamentos conceptuais,

materiais e processuais que artistas visuais, cineastas, escritores, etc. frequentemente privilegiam. Andreas Huyssen nota esse fenômeno de transição da obsessão moderna com o futuro para uma outra fixação: a fixação com o passado e com a memória do passado. Diz o autor, então:

Um dos fenômenos culturais e políticos mais surpreendentes dos últimos anos tem sido o surgimento da memória como uma preocupação cultural e política fundamental nas sociedades ocidentais, uma viragem para o passado que contrasta fortemente com a preferência pelo futuro tão característica das primeiras décadas da modernidade do século XX (Huyssen 2003: 7).²

Para Huyssen, esta viragem, cujo *locus* central se situa num acontecimento em particular, domina toda a questão. O Holocausto e o indissociável trauma a ele inerente podem resultar numa amnésia (a partir de Adorno e da sua ideia de esquecimento como resultado da cultura de massas), pela via da saturação e da inerente perda de significado histórico. Huyssen propõe, assim, um antídoto: uma política da memória produtiva que se caracteriza pelo ato de lembrar de modo crítico, reconhecendo que a memória é sempre parcial e transitória, sendo permeada pelo esquecimento.

Esta ideia de memória produtiva, dir-se-ia, pode aplicar-se às práticas artísticas no contexto da ‘globalização da memória’ (Huyssen 2003: 13), que emerge a partir dos processos de descolonização, dos estudos pós-coloniais e da emergência dos estudos da pós-memória, sendo que aqui ‘o Holocausto perde a sua natureza de índice de um evento histórico específico e passa a funcionar como metáfora para outras histórias e memórias traumáticas’ (Huyssen 2003: 14), numa constante entre o global e o local. Convocar aqui a produção teórica de Marianne Hirsch, Saidiya Hartman e Aleida Assmann dá-nos uma perspetiva deste arco. Tendo o Holocausto como ponto de partida, mas indo além dele, Hirsch (1992–1993) reflete acerca da transmissão intergeracional da memória do trauma através do conceito de pós-memória, isto é, a relação das segundas-gerações daqueles que viveram eventos traumáticos com as memórias desses mesmos eventos.

‘Pós-memória’ descreve a relação que a ‘geração seguinte’ tem com o trauma pessoal, coletivo e cultural daqueles que vieram antes — com experiências que ‘lembram’ apenas por meio das histórias, imagens e comportamentos com os quais cresceram. Mas essas experiências foram-lhes transmitidas de forma tão profunda e afetiva que parecem ser memórias por direito próprio. A conexão da pós-memória com o passado é, portanto, mediada não pela lembrança, mas antes pelo investimento na imaginação, na projeção e na criação. Crescer com

² Tradução minha. Todas as traduções seguintes são da minha autoria, exceto indicação contrária.

memórias herdadas avassaladoras, dominadas por narrativas que precederam o nosso nascimento ou a nossa consciência, significa o risco de ver as nossas próprias histórias de vida deslocadas, ou mesmo esvaziadas, pelos nossos antepassados. Significa ser moldado, ainda que indiretamente, por fragmentos traumáticos de eventos que ainda desafiam a reconstrução da narrativa e excedem a compreensão. Esses eventos aconteceram no passado, mas os seus efeitos continuam no presente. Esta é, acredito, a estrutura da pós-memória e o processo da sua geração (Hirsch 1992–1993: 5).

Essas são memórias, portanto, transmitidas por via familiar, por via do testemunho, das imagens que sobrevivem, mas também por via do espaço mediático coletivo, a História oficial, mas também a história dessa memória produtiva, como descreveu Huysen, isto é, mediada pela imaginação, pela reconfiguração, e, também, pela estética. De facto, esta problemática é tanto ética quanto estética, e relembra-nos essa dicotomia fundamental que nos foi trazida por Susan Sontag no seminal *On Photography*, salientando as limitações da fotografia enquanto ferramenta ética, sendo que:

[...] as qualidades particulares das fotografias tendem a ser absorvidas pelo *pathos* generalizado do tempo passado. A distância estética parece inerente à própria experiência de olhar para fotografias, mesmo que não imediatamente, certamente com o decorrer do tempo. O tempo acaba por colocar a maioria das fotografias, mesmo as mais amadoras, no nível da arte (Sontag 1977: 21).

A fotografia, como o cinema, tanta vezes tida como ferramenta de testemunho da História, surge como ferramenta essencial nesta construção da pós-memória, mas também no desenvolvimento das suas ramificações críticas, de certa forma ultrapassando a sua cristalização enquanto objeto estético e trazendo de volta o seu potencial ético. A própria autora de *The Generation of Postmemory* desenvolve uma reflexão sobre o papel da fotografia neste complexo processo de transmissão de memória, partindo de uma relação entre fotografias de família (da sua e de outras com as quais se cruzou), as dicotomias evocadas por estas (presença/ausência, vida/morte) e a natureza da sua sobrevivência no futuro, através da mediação de quem as vê:

É precisamente a natureza indexical da fotografia, o seu estatuto de relíquia, vestígio ou fetiche — a sua ligação direta com a presença material da pessoa fotografada — que intensifica o seu estatuto de presságio de morte e, simultânea e concomitantemente, a sua capacidade de significar vida (Hirsch 1992–1993: 6).

Do presente focado no futuro passámos, então, a um presente completamente focado no passado, facto também notado por Hartman (2008), autora que relaciona a memória histórica com a construção dos estados-nação. Aleida Assmann traz-nos ainda importantes considerações para esta discussão, na senda da viragem identificada por Huyssen. A autora nota aqui uma substancial diferença entre o século XIX, quando os estados se criaram pela força heroica, e o século XX, no contexto pós-colonial e pós-comunista, quando emergem novos estados na sequência de um percurso de dor e de trauma (Assmann 2015). Sendo a memória cultural transmitida entre gerações um aspeto comum a todas as culturas, Assmann distingue as estratégias de organização da informação que é transmitida, ora de repetição (como no caso da transmissão oral de conhecimento, rituais, etc.), ora de duração, nomeadamente a escrita e as imagens, sendo que a estas corresponde uma existência para lá do corpo. A memória cultural transforma-se, assim, num processo que pode ser construído (uma canonização) ou inconsciente (aqui se destacando as teorias de Aby Warburg e a psicanálise freudiana), e do qual resulta uma mitificação de teor nacionalista — a construção de narrativas nacionais que Peter Sloterdijk cunhou de ‘mitos políticos’ que protegem os estados das suas ações passadas (Sloterdijk cit. em Assmann 2015: 84). Conclui, então, Assmann:

Tornamo-nos mais suscetíveis a ‘eventos’ que simplesmente teriam ficado para trás, num passado que já não seria acessível. Teriam desaparecido completamente dos registos históricos, só agora reaparecendo através de vários meios, envolvendo testemunhos pessoais, novos padrões éticos e a reformulação histórica das narrativas nacionais (Assmann 2015: 85).

Diríamos que nos encontramos aqui no campo da subjetividade como testemunha perante a impossibilidade de falar do arquivo, como dela nos fala Giorgio Agamben no capítulo ‘The Archive and Testimony’ (1999). Colocando a tónica no sujeito, isto é, colocando a questão de quem tem a possibilidade do discurso, Agamben traz a lume também a questão fulcral de quais as condições para essa possibilidade existir, uma vez que é a autoridade que confere essa possibilidade. Saidiya Hartman aventa uma possibilidade: é através da subjetividade, ou da fabulação crítica, que o arquivo (a imagem, a escrita, o objeto...) ganha voz e espaço no processo de transmissão da memória cultural, desconstruindo o mito e reconfigurando-a. Trata-se de reconfigurar a memória reconfigurando o arquivo, problematizando-o, se tal for possível, para além dos limites da sua constituição (Hartman 2008: 11). Isto é, olhar para os vazios, para os silêncios, para as exclusões do arquivo e devolver-nos estórias imaginadas do que poderia ter sido. Mas,

também, dar a ver esses mesmos vazios, silêncios e exclusões para reconfigurar aquilo que nos é mostrado pelo arquivo e aquilo que a narrativa oficial nos conta.

Há, portanto, espaços, interstícios, na formação do arquivo que podem emergir na atualidade, por exemplo, quando há uma concatenação dos materiais de um arquivo com a subjetividade autobiográfica. São esses elementos subjetivos que vão pôr em causa a totalidade do arquivo, a objetividade da história e expor os mecanismos subjacentes a essas formações ou construções de conhecimento, pois 'não há poder político sem o controlo do arquivo, ou até mesmo da própria memória. Uma democratização de facto pode sempre ser medida através deste critério essencial: o acesso ao arquivo e a participação na sua constituição e na sua interpretação' (Derrida 1996: 4).

De facto, Hal Foster tinha já notado a predileção pelas práticas de arquivo na arte da contemporaneidade, através de artistas que trabalham eles próprios como arquivistas, não só comentando eventos históricos e arquivos oficiais, mas complicando essa(s) história(s) com a sua visão subjetiva e criando um conhecimento alternativo, ou uma contramemória a partir de um vasto e múltiplo conjunto de fontes. Diz-nos, então, Foster que 'essas fontes são familiares, obtidas nos arquivos da cultura de massas, para garantir uma legibilidade que pode ser alterada ou desvirtuada; mas também podem ser obscuras, resgatadas por um gesto de conhecimento alternativo ou contra-memória' (Foster 2004: 4).

A proliferação de trabalhos documentais e de arquivo no contexto português dão-nos conta do esforço dessa reconfiguração da memória, quer em relação ao colonialismo, quer em relação à ditadura e ao período que se segue ao seu desmantelamento. O cinema, ou a imagem em movimento, tem sido um dos principais instrumentos dessa reconfiguração e do questionamento de um imaginário coletivo pautado mais pelo esquecimento (a amnésia) do que propriamente pela memória. A urgência da problematização do arquivo emerge no campo artístico com enorme relevância no contexto português sobretudo a partir das primeiras décadas do século XXI, permeando produções visuais, artísticas e cinematográficas.

Veja-se apenas, a título de exemplo, o trabalho de cineastas como Susana de Sousa Dias, com *Still Life* (2005), que justapõe imagens filmadas pela ditadura portuguesa com imagens do quotidiano, assim evidenciando os efeitos do controlo e autoritarismo do regime; e *48* (2010), em que a estratégia de justaposição apresenta um conjunto de fotografias de arquivo de presos políticos retiradas do arquivo da PIDE com os seus próprios testemunhos; ou Margarida Cardoso, com obras como *Kuxa Kanema — O Nascimento do Cinema* (2003) ou *Natal 71*. Artistas como Filipa César, que trabalhou a destruição e sobrevivência do arquivo cinematográfico da Guiné-Bissau em *Spell Reel* (2017), e Ana Vidigal, com veremos adiante, cujo trabalho se alinha, na nossa perspetiva, com o diagnóstico de Huyssen acerca

das possibilidades de representação do passado: ‘Uma vez reconhecida a lacuna entre a realidade e a sua representação na linguagem ou na imagem, devemos, em princípio, estar abertos a muitas possibilidades diferentes de representar o real e as suas memórias’ (Huysen 2003: 19).

Entre realidade e representação há, então, através do arquivo e, sobretudo, dos seus fragmentos, uma sucessão de espaços vazios (ou esvaziados) deixado pela estrutura própria do arquivo material ou imagético, pequenas ‘falhas’ com potencial sísmico entre fragmentos do passado que nos surgem no presente como ruínas desse mesmo passado, sendo esses espaços preenchidos (pela via da imaginação, da subjetividade, da fabulação crítica) e remontados, reconfigurados, em novas estórias, imagens, memórias. Convocamos então, aqui, a fragmentação inerente a qualquer arquivo. A própria definição de arquivo no dicionário evidencia algumas das suas principais características, mas também a sua problemática: é um conjunto de documentos (material) que se assumem como prova ou evidência do passado e que contam uma história, mas também o lugar onde esses documentos são acumulados. Recorrendo à dicionarização do conceito, um arquivo pode referir-se a 1) um ‘conjunto de *documentos* manuscritos e acumulados no decurso das atividades de uma entidade pública ou privada [...] posteriormente conservados como *prova ou evidência do passado* [...]’; 2) um ‘conjunto de documentos relativos à *história* de um país, região, cidade, instituição, família, pessoa, etc.’; ou 3) um ‘recinto [*lugar*] onde se guardam esses documentos [...]’ (Houaiss 2001: 182; ênfase adicionada).

A concatenação entre memória e fragmento poderá, então, dizer-se basilar a qualquer arquivo, instituindo-se o arquivo como sistema de funcionamento e como prática de natureza fragmentária. Relembrando Foucault, ‘na sua totalidade, o arquivo não é descritível; e é incontornável na sua atualidade. Dã-se por fragmentos, regiões e níveis, tanto melhor e tanto mais nitidamente, sem dúvida, quanto mais o tempo dele nos separa’ (Foucault 2018: 179). Há então, no arquivo, segundo Foucault, uma descontinuidade entre aquele que é o nosso tempo e o tempo da história, descontinuidade essa que transforma o fragmento que compõe o arquivo em ruína, assumindo-se aqui o termo *ruína* na sua duplicidade semântica, isto é, ruína enquanto *vestígio* da destruição de um bem material outrora *inteiro*, e metaforicamente, enquanto referente de um estado de declínio ou decadência de algo (de natureza material ou simbólica) (Foucault 2018: 179; ênfase adicionada).

Teríamos, então, o arquivo como um conjunto de ruínas do passado, desconexas ou amplamente organizadas, sendo a sua reorganização indispensável para uma reconfiguração desse passado se possa operar. Como nota Brian Dillon (2011: 11), os paradoxos (temporais e históricos) são parte integrante do conceito, que integra não só a consciência da passagem do tempo, mas também uma estrutura que organiza fragmentos dessa ruína, assim lhe atribuindo um sentido.

O livro de artista como prática *menor*?

Ana Vidigal identifica muito do seu trabalho em formatos alternativos à pintura e constituídos de diversos fragmentos como ‘trabalho paralelo’. Como nota a artista:

Sempre fiz colagens. E sempre utilizei coisas apanhadas. Hoje tenho pena de algumas colagens que utilizei, tê-las utilizado com pintura por cima. Por hoje, se as tivesse novamente, utilizava-as a cru. Começo a fazer o chamado ‘trabalho paralelo’ quando começo a perceber que quem decide sou eu. Que escuso de ‘camuflar’ (Ana Vidigal cit. em Brito e Dinis 2009: 11).

Neste conjunto incluem-se os seus livros de artista, também realizados em pequenos intervalos entre a realização de pinturas de grande formato, indicando um processo mais reflexivo, e que têm vindo a assumir crescente relevância no todo da sua obra. Também podemos abordar este conjunto, e em geral o livro de artista enquanto objeto de arte, a partir do conceito de ‘literatura menor’, como formulado por Deleuze e Guattari a propósito de Franz Kafka (Deleuze e Guattari 2002). Mas o que é, ou como se constitui, uma ‘literatura menor’? Constitui-se pela desterritorialização da língua maior por uma minoria; literatura menor é literatura revolucionária, sendo que podemos servir-nos deste conceito, trocando (traduzindo) língua, por linguagem, neste caso linguagem artística, sendo a linguagem artística frequentemente equivalente à tal narrativa totalizante.

E como se caracteriza, então, a desterritorialização operada por estes objetos ditos ‘livros de artista’, e como é que essa desterritorialização modifica a linguagem maior, a linguagem artística, a linguagem da narrativa dominante? Desterritorialização implica movimento, fluxo, tal como estas obras, cujas características permitem um fluxo de ideias, de experiências, de imagens, mas também de matérias (no sentido mais estrito de materiais) que são descontextualizadas, reconfiguradas, (re) significadas em diferentes espaços e em diferentes temporalidades através do gesto criativo (Oliveira 2020), num fluxo que se exprime na própria materialidade do livro de artista.

Este fluxo exige um contacto relacional físico com o sujeito que lê/vê a obra que não foi apenas pintada, desenhada, escrita, montada, fotografada. Na maior parte dos casos, o objeto final resulta de uma multiplicidade dessas práticas, funcionando como um desafio ao olhar, à leitura e às mais convencionais formas de interpretação de qualquer objecto cultural. De facto, o livro de artista tem na sua base mais uma processualidade constante (que continua através da relação com o sujeito que com ele se relaciona). Há neles sempre uma dicotomia constante entre

ler e ver/olhar, embora vá muito além da dicotomia texto/imagem (cf. Dietrich 2017: 62–75). Numa tentativa de compreender e classificar o gesto que o livro de artista exige do seu leitor, Lucy Lippard chamou-lhe *skimming*, um fazer correr que ‘se encontra algures entre o ato de ler e o de olhar’ (Lippard 1978: 73), verdadeiro desafio a ambas as práticas conforme as entendemos habitualmente.

A multiplicidade que caracteriza o objecto assim designado, livro de artista, estende-se à variedade de formatos infinitos, de materiais e de processos, mas também aos sentidos que convoca — tactilidade, visualidade, movimento, etc.: todos compõem um quadro no qual as potencialidades em termos de produção e de receção do livro de artista se configuram como infinitas. Sendo habitual a arrumação dos livros de artista em diferentes categorias (fólio, livro-caixa, livro-objeto, etc.), consideramos que esse exercício não é aqui indispensável, já que a leitura que pretendemos apresentar destes trabalhos de Ana Vidigal está mais intrinsecamente relacionada com os seus processos de criação e receção do que propriamente com a categorização dos objetos artísticos finais.

Seguimos aqui Anne Moeglin-Delcroix, que, nos seus variados estudos sobre livros de artista a partir de inícios do século XX, tem vindo a focar a sua análise sobretudo em qual ‘o tipo de relação que se estabelece entre o livresco e o artístico’ (Moeglin-Delcroix 1997: 8), sendo que o que determina a sua especificidade é, sobretudo, uma libertação das habituais conceções e relações entre livro e arte, sem esquecer a sua materialidade:

Embora seja um livro verdadeiro, se assim o podemos dizer, um livro que nos é banal e familiar, fabricado como os nossos livros comuns, o livro de artista não deixa de responder a um projeto artístico específico. É totalmente livre, sendo plenamente arte; talvez seja ainda mais livro por ser arte (Moeglin-Delcroix 1997: 8).

Sendo um espaço, ou uma ‘zona de atividade’, como formula Johanna Drucker, ‘concebido na interseção de diferentes disciplinas, áreas e ideias’ (Drucker 1995: 1), o livro de artista não deixa de ser também da ordem de uma temporalidade, sobretudo se atentarmos num largo conjunto de livros de artista que se constituem a partir de materiais de arquivo à procura de uma articulação com a história.

Desde Warburg, pelo menos, passámos a pensar na história como uma ressignificação constante realizada através de imagens ou de símbolos que ressurgem mnemonicamente (Warburg 2000), isto é, através de associações que permitem a própria sobrevivência do passado. Eis aqui a base de um empreendimento teórico que visava sobretudo entender o fenómeno da ‘memória coletiva e as funções sociais da arte’, como é referido por Kurt W. Forster (1976: 169). Como de resto também notou Walter Benjamin:

[...] a maneira como o passado recebe a impressão de uma atualidade mais avançada é dada pela *imagem* na qual ele está compreendido. E essa penetração dialética, essa capacidade de tornar presentes as correlações passadas, é a prova da verdade da ação presente. Isso significa que ela acende o pavio do explosivo que jaz naquilo que foi (Walter Benjamin cit. em Didi-Huberman 2015: 5) [sublinhado nosso; itálico no original].

De facto, o que aqui desperta interesse na contemporaneidade não é tanto um método de olhar para o significado das imagens e dos signos, decifrando-o, mas mais ‘a natureza da comunicação e a subsequente transformação desses signos’, como nota Forster na introdução a *Aby Warburg: The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity* (Warburg 1999: 2), dada a centralidade que os processos históricos e culturais assumiram na metodologia warburguiana. As potencialidades de interpretação vão assim além da própria imagem e do próprio signo, encontrando-se com o gesto artístico e, diríamos, com a própria ‘localização’ do artista e do leitor. Diríamos que o livro de artista cujo papel tem vindo assumir uma enorme centralidade na arte ocidental a partir de meados do século XX,³ é um local privilegiado para esse encontro, sobretudo quando o gesto artístico se presta a tentar lançar algum tipo de compreensão alternativa do passado, da memória à pós-memória. Esta dinâmica está bastante presente no processo de Ana Vidigal, acabando por se estender para além dos livros de artista.

Ana Vidigal e o papel da memória

O arquivo não existe apenas como um depósito neutro de documentos do passado, já que, como nos recorda Griselda Pollock, este ‘não se encontra apenas impregnado de relações de poder, de seleções e de exclusões que ajudam a dar uma certa forma ao sentido do passado que reconstruímos. Este é também formado pelos nossos desejos, pelas nossas fantasias e pelas nossas ansiedades’ (Pollock 2007: 275). Esta dimensão pessoal, subjetiva e quase autobiográfica é um aspeto central no trabalho de Ana Vidigal, cuja obra e processo artístico resultam de um esforço de ressignificação permanente, produzindo obras que se baseiam fortemente nas memórias e nos silêncios, individuais e coletivos, da Guerra Colonial portuguesa e do Estado Novo: o processo criativo da artista é desencadeado pelas características materiais e formais de inúmeros objetos, como cartões-postais, que se misturam com as suas próprias memórias dos tempos ditatoriais e do pós-ditadura, das histórias da (sua) família e da perceção individual da história (ou seja, do tempo que atravessa os próprios acontecimentos históricos).

³ Johanna Drucker designou mesmo o século XX como o ‘século dos Livros de Artista’ (Drucker 1995).

O referido ‘trabalho paralelo’ de Vidigal emana do contacto e da pesquisa dentro do seu próprio arquivo pessoal, prática que remonta à sua infância, como a artista descreve em entrevista a Helena Mendes Pereira a propósito da exposição ‘Dias de Verão: uma Espécie de Antologia de Ana Vidigal’ (2025):

A minha avó guardava tudo o que era assim coisas de família e tinha um sótão muito grande e ela tinha tudo muito bem guardado em caixinhas. Eu dei cabo de muita coisa, mas porque me foi permitido. Porque a minha avó disse-me: podes utilizar tudo o que está nestas caixas. Primeiro foi: podes mexer em tudo o que está nestas caixas. Eu era miúda, portanto eu abria e logicamente já não guardava da mesma maneira. Já havia coisas baralhadas. E depois, quando já era mais crescidinha e já estava na escola de belas-artes, ela disse-me sempre que eu poderia usar esses papéis como eu quisesse. [...] Eram coisas de família, cadernos do meu pai, livros de banda desenhada do meu pai, panos bordados para as minhas avós, para as minhas tias, esse tipo de coisas que eu utilizo e algumas que eu nunca utilizei, mas pode ser que ainda venha a utilizar.⁴

A prática de abrir caixas, de vasculhar um arquivo que a artista foi não só mantendo, mas também construindo ao longo de várias décadas, manteve-se como parte integrante do processo criativo até hoje:

[...] quando quero começar alguma coisa, vou ao armazém, àquilo que eu costumo [fazer que é] abrir caixas. E, quando eu abro as caixas, materiais que eu já não via há muito tempo, ou que eu já nem me lembrava que tinha guardado. E, a partir daí, desenvolve-se todo um trabalho que não tem nada a ver com o que já foi feito, muitas vezes com esse mesmo material, mas há dez anos atrás.⁵

Na obra *Penélope* (2000), por exemplo, deparamo-nos com uma colcha composta pela junção de aerogramas, cartas trocadas entre o pai da artista e a sua mãe durante o período em que serviu na Guerra Colonial na Guiné. Essas cartas foram compostas num todo em forma de colcha, cobrindo uma cama, encontrando-se seladas dentro de sacos plásticos de forma a que estejam inacessíveis ao público por se tratarem de mensagens que a artista considerava da esfera da intimidade dos pais (e que, aliás, a própria nunca leu), formando uma peça que estabelece um diálogo profundo entre a experiência individual e a história coletiva. Aqui, a referência ao mito clássico de Penélope, a esposa de Ulisses, que espera pelo retorno do marido, relaciona-se diretamente com a espera da esposa pelo marido que combate na guerra.

⁴ Vidigal, Ana. 2025. ‘Dias de Verão: uma Espécie de Antologia de Ana Vidigal.’ Entrevista em vídeo. Publicado a 15 de julho de 2025, pela ZET Galeria de Arte. YouTube, 22:13. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWQGloZoses>.

⁵ Vidigal, Ana. 2025. ‘Dias de Verão: uma Espécie de Antologia de Ana Vidigal.’ Entrevista em vídeo. Publicado a 15 de julho de 2025. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWQGloZoses>.

Há aqui um fluxo temporal e geográfico: mensagens que circulam entre continentes, entre uma casa de família em Lisboa e uma base militar na Guiné, entre um tempo passado e um tempo presente, que olha para estes resquícios materiais, os reorganiza e reconfigura os seus sentidos. Um novo sentido desta história emerge, portanto, da releitura, feita pela artista através da prática e pelo recetor da obra, que cria interpretações e relações com a mesma. No caso de *Penélope*, os aerogramas deixam de ser apenas uma forma de comunicação pessoal e íntima para passar a representar um sentimento coletivo de dor, de afastamento, de ausência e de perda em relação àqueles que se encontravam a combater numa guerra cujo sentido é aqui também questionado.

Foi de uma caixa que emergiu também uma outra obra em que Ana Vidigal produziu numa relação mais direta com a Guerra Colonial, tema bastante presente na sua obra, ‘costurando’⁶ as suas memórias de infância com a sua perceção atual quer do conflito, quer da própria ditadura em Portugal. Na instalação *VOID* (2007), Vidigal socorre-se de um conjunto de fotografias de família, das suas memórias e do ‘vazio’ provocado pela ausência do pai durante a sua estada na guerra, tendo como ponto de partida uma fotografia do seu quarto em criança da época que é fielmente reproduzido na instalação. Para além da cama, das estantes, os livros, a caixa de bolachas da marca Elba na qual ainda se guardam cartas e desenhos enviados para o pai nessa época, a mesinha de cabeceira. Na cama, uma colcha como a de *Penélope*, formada de postais encapsulados em pequenas bolsas de plástico, simultaneamente visíveis e inacessíveis; nas paredes, um conjunto de babetes com textos de missivas, fotografias e recortes que remetem para o ambiente familiar e a infância do irmão mais novo de Vidigal. A relação entre as diferentes perspetivas que evocam é clara:

[...] um é a guerra das mulheres, o outro é a guerra das crianças. [...] A *Penélope* é sobre as cartas que o meu pai mandava para a minha mãe e a minha mãe para ele; e o *VOID* é sobre nós enquanto crianças, com ausência do pai (Ana Vidigal cit. em Oliveira 2022: 227).

O uso de materiais fotográficos de arquivo, quer do seu arquivo familiar, quer de outras fontes, naquilo que podemos designar como um ‘arquivo coletivo perdido’ é central na totalidade do trabalho de Vidigal — seja ele pintura, seja ‘trabalho paralelo’ —, mas evidencia-se de forma particularmente relevante nos seus livros de artista, como por exemplo *Caderno V* (2000—em processo) [Fig. 1]. Como notou Isabel Carlos, Ana Vidigal opera uma crítica social e de costumes, mas fá-lo de uma forma muito particular, sendo ‘alguém que “arruma” a história por cores e imagens, e não por datas e factos’ (Isabel Carlos cit. em Vidigal 2010: 12).

⁶ Uso o termo ‘costura’ a partir da ideia de ‘costura da memória’, desenvolvida pela artista brasileira Rosana Paulino na sua obra.



Fig. 1 Ana Vidigal, *Caderno V*, 2020
— em processo (vista da exposição ‘Matéria
Impressa, Matéria Nômada’. Museu Nogueira
da Silva, Braga, 2022). Fotografia de Nuno
Guimarães.

Neste sentido, diríamos também, arruma a história por pequenos eventos; os eventos menores da intimidade e do quotidiano do indivíduo que estão ligados ao quadro mais geral das ‘coisas’.

A forma como os contextos e as histórias, neste caso as histórias pessoais e familiares que são um reflexo da história do país, influenciam a nossa forma de ver e a (sua) forma de fazer (arte) através de uma construção baseada em imagens, documentos, materiais, performances, teorias e testemunhos existentes — sendo que todos estes elementos são já, em si, *migrações* intertextuais e mediadas. Há um fluxo de fragmentos de imagens e de materiais, mas também de afetos de percepções, as ‘pequenas coisas’ e o quotidiano, transformados em matéria poética e política através de uma prática de (re)colecção como gesto de montagem e reconstrução da memória. Esta prática exprime-se não só nos objectos mas também no próprio processo artístico de Ana Vidigal.

Nos seus livros, Ana Vidigal remete a um modelo de recolecção que é familiar e pessoal, sem dúvida, mas que ultrapassa essa dimensão. No seu trabalho, ao sobrepor várias técnicas à pintura, Ana Vidigal recupera elementos da memória pessoal, familiar, política e cultural criados a partir da perspectiva de uma nação colonizadora. Dessas composições, emergem construções estéticas e críticas poderosas em torno de questões como o colonialismo e a condição da mulher na



Fig. 2 Ana Vidigal, *Caderno V*, 2020 — em processo (pormenor). Fotografia da autora.

sociedade, entre muitos outros temas. A própria Ana Vidigal mencionou que essas obras, baseadas em suas próprias impressões e experiências, sempre têm o potencial de despertar nos outros algo diferente, ligado às suas próprias experiências.⁷

No entanto, aquilo a que o público acede é algo da ordem do coletivo. *Caderno V* resulta de um processo fragmentário, um livro no qual são justapostos nas diferentes páginas, ao longo de vários anos, diversos elementos variados como fotografias, recortes de jornais e revistas femininas, citações de várias obras literárias, texto manuscrito pela artista, lãs, embrulhos de chocolate, terminando com uma sequência de jogos de labirintos publicados em jornais antigos, antiguidade denunciada pelo amarelecimento do papel [Fig. 2]. Aqui, onde encontramos várias fotografias de mulheres anônimas com a legenda ‘esposa do soldado desconhecido’, o hibridismo do trabalho de Vidigal torna-se evidente.

Caderno V surge como dispositivo de reimaginação do passado, uma ‘fabulação crítica’, como define Hartman (2008), num momento que, como nota também Huyssen (2003: 99): ‘é necessário haver discriminação e memória produtiva’. Essas

⁷ ‘[...] As pessoas da equipa que estava a montar a exposição, que nem era da Gulbenkian, estavam muito silenciosas a trabalhar, e quando chega a altura de montar o VOID, há um que começa a falar. “Ah, eu estive na Guerra Colonial!”. Todos tinham feito a Guerra Colonial, todos tinham estado não sei onde e começaram a falar. Foi impressionante. Todos aqueles homens que estavam ali, eram para aí uns sete, oito, tinham feito a Guerra Colonial. Não conheço praticamente ninguém da minha geração que não tenha tido alguém na Guerra. E, no entanto, era um assunto que depois do 25 de Abril ninguém falava. É que ninguém falava! E eu só trabalho sobre aquilo que são experiências minhas e o meu caso foi um dos mais felizes da Guerra Colonial, não é, porque não teve consequências de maior para nós’ (Vidigal cit. em Oliveira 2022: 228).



Fig. 3 Ana Vidigal, *Caderno V*, 2020
— em processo (pormenor). Fotografia da autora

fotografias foram descobertas/encontradas em processo deambulatório na Feira da Ladra,⁸ em Lisboa, quando a artista reparou que havia muitos retratos de mulheres sozinhas. Este encontro despertou a imaginação da artista, focando-se na perspetiva destas mulheres cujos retratos se perderam no tempo na história. As fotografias destas mulheres sucedem-se ao longo do livro, às quais Vidigal acrescentou um elemento gráfico: um círculo vermelho em torno do rosto de cada mulher, a fazer lembrar um alvo. O círculo surge mais à frente no livro em algumas fotografias não identificadas, mas de uma forma bastante diferente: nestas fotografias, uma criança que joga à bola, um casal (homem e mulher) e duas mulheres. Dois retratos semelhantes, a preto e branco, em frente a uma casa. A mesma casa, a mesma mulher com o rosto recortado num círculo posteriormente colado na parte lateral da fotografia [Fig. 3].

Não sabemos qual o papel da mulher em cada um destes pares, que parentesco os liga, mas sobressai através da intervenção artística na fotografia a instrumentalização das mulheres pelo ideário da ditadura e, frequentemente, o jogo de sorte

⁸ Mercado de artigos usados e velharias cuja origem remonta ao século XIII.

(talvez seja para aí que remete o jogo infantil ‘quantos-queres’ na página oposta a uma destas imagens). E é precisamente a um desses tipos de instrumentalização, as chamadas madrinhas de guerra, que enviavam fotografia para os combatentes da Guerra Colonial, que estas mulheres anónimas também podem ser associadas.⁹ Vidigal resgata-as assim do silêncio a que foram remetidas, dessa instrumentalização, focando os seus rostos e, logo, a sua identidade e individualidade sempre negadas. ‘Mais uma vez, estou a olhar para o papel submisso das mulheres e filhas desses homens que esperavam pacificamente que o regime causasse as suas mortes’, diz a artista.

Nesse sentido, o livro de artista de 2016, *Caixa Negra*,¹⁰ em formato caixa, é muito relevante. Nele, Vidigal traz a lume o silêncio do racismo em Portugal e as raízes muito profundas desse racismo, que também está presente na linguagem e, obviamente, nas imagens que foram fundamentais na construção ideológica do regime e na legitimação dessa mesma construção. Trata-se de uma série de intervenções em postais com fotografias de nativos trazidas de África pelo bisavô de Ana Vidigal, que participou nas expedições colonialistas portuguesas em Moçambique no século XIX. O seu bisavô trouxe esses postais para os mostrar à sua família, esposa e filhos, para estes verem ‘como era África’, como referiu a própria Ana Vidigal em conversa com a autora a propósito deste trabalho.

Os postais foram trabalhados com intervenções plásticas, nomeadamente pequenos autocolantes coloridos e fitas-cola com padrões vários, como se operando uma cisão na dicotomia preto/branco e inerente metonímia moral, evocada pelas fotografias tiradas pelos colonos aos povos originários. Além das intervenções visuais, há elementos linguísticos significativos, nomeadamente frases retiradas de um dicionário de provérbios organizado por palavras. Vidigal procurou os provérbios associados à palavra ‘negro’ — ditos de uso popular outrora generalizados e culturalmente aceites, profundamente racistas, explícita ou metaforicamente. Por exemplo ‘negra é a pimenta e todos comem dela’, transcrito a grafite por debaixo do retrato de uma jovem negra, sorridente, de torso nu e olhos tapados pela colagem azul e vermelha (a legenda do postal refere apenas um ‘busto de rapariga’, de Angola) [Fig. 4].

Identificamos aqui certamente a dificuldade evocada por Saidiya Hartman na reprodução de representações fotográficas de corpos negros, anónimos, difícil de fazer sem que se reproduza o discurso de violência originário através da sua apropriação. No entanto, ao contrário de *Caderno V*, onde podemos encontrar um processo de ‘fabulação crítica’ que nos traz à consciência a instrumentalização das mulheres pelo próprio Estado Novo, com esta *Caixa Negra* expõe-se não só o racismo explícito das imagens, mas também todo um sistema de exploração colonial, pela função perversa das fotografias, tiradas para serem transformadas em postais, com

⁹ As ‘madrinhas de guerra’ comunicavam com milhares de soldados que combatiam na Guerra Colonial via aerograma, serviço que permitia a comunicação entre as famílias durante o conflito. Esta figura, inspirada na madrinha de guerra da Primeira Guerra Mundial, cumpriu o seu papel entre 1961 e 1974. Como nota Fernando Martins, ‘tendo sido uma criação (ou reinvenção) do MNF, as “madrinhas de guerra” foram uma peça de uma vasta e eficiente máquina de propaganda político-ideológica’ (Martins 2011: 81).

¹⁰ Todas as páginas foram publicadas em versão fac-similada no catálogo da exposição ‘Dias de Verão: uma Espécie de Antologia de Ana Vidigal’, na Zet Gallery, em Braga (Mendes Pereira 2025).



Fig. 4 Ana Vidigal, *Caixa Negra*, 2016 (vista da exposição 'Matéria Impressa, Matéria Nômada'. Museu Nogueira da Silva, Braga, 2022). Fotografia de Nuno Guimarães.

uma intenção etnográfica e até lúdica sustentada pela instrumentalização do corpo e da cultura negros. E se há de facto um descompasso entre cada imagem, a sua legenda (provérbio) e a intervenção plástica: uma espécie de fricção que nos confronta com a memória silenciada do passado colonial: 'negro suando, branco dançando', escreve Vidigal por debaixo de um postal identificado como sendo a fotografia de um 'atirador de zagaia' de Bailundo (Angola). O atirador está escondido por detrás de uma profusão de pequenas bolinhas coloridas (dançantes?), apenas se deixando entrever o braço com o arco e flecha artesanais — a luta *versus* a animada carnificina colonial que a narrativa oficial silencia?

O ponto de vista da artista Ana Vidigal hoje não é certamente o ponto de vista de Ana Vidigal criança que é evocado em *VOID*, mas talvez haja uma correspon-

dência entre a visão da criança sobre o que estava a acontecer e o processo artístico — abrir as caixas é ato de extrema curiosidade, de busca, de procura¹¹ —, arrumando imagens, palavras, símbolos, ideologia e extraindo um outro sentido deles. Preencher o vazio deixado pelo pai sentido pela criança com a acumulação de assemblagem de imagens, palavras, materiais, mas também os vazios deixados pela narrativa oficial da ditadura e da própria Guerra Colonial. Crítica da moralidade imposta pelo Estado Novo, que foi mantida e transmitida intergeracionalmente.

Ana Vidigal utiliza, em toda a sua obra, estratégias e materiais lúdicos, aparentemente vazios, que, no entanto, têm a capacidade de evocar silêncios coletivos através de um falar individual e íntimo. De facto, é o individual que fala em cada fragmento, em cada fotografia, em cada carta, em cada postal, em cada diário. E o livro de artista parece surgir no trabalho de Vidigal como veículo particularmente eficaz nessa crítica da memória funcionando como experiência partilhada a partir de um conjunto de ‘ruínas’ (fragmentos aparentemente desconexos, esquecidos, e, até, inócuos), materiais do passado. Esses fragmentos remetem à ditadura e a temas associados, como a Guerra Colonial¹² ou o papel das mulheres e da sua subalternização na estrutura ideológica do Estado Novo, cuja atualidade política se mantém operativa na sociedade portuguesa.

É, de facto, relevante que o registo fotográfico seja um dos principais dispositivos de memória dos quais Vidigal se socorre, não só resgatando e pondo em evidência a complexidade do momento e do contexto em que foram produzidas, mas também acrescentando-lhes camadas do seu olhar crítico no presente. Relembramos Hirsch, que salienta que a fotografia medeia a relação entre as diferentes gerações porque invoca a ideia de morte e de perda, e ao mesmo tempo, desperta em quem a olha um certo modo de ver que exige uma narrativa que, frequentemente, não foi contada (Hirsch 1992–1993: 9). Note-se a particularidade de que esta narrativa não tem de corresponder necessariamente ao que aconteceu no momento em que a fotografia foi efetivamente tirada, podendo a imagem invocar um acontecimento outro (ou, até, uma fabulação, diríamos nós). Logo, ‘o espectador preenche aquilo que a imagem deixa de fora’ (Hirsch 1992–1993: 9).

Concluimos com uma nota sobre este formato artístico: de facto, a forma como se ‘vê’ um livro é muito diferente de como se olha para uma pintura, na sua sequência de verso e reverso. O livro impõe uma forma de olhar para dentro, exige um adentrar no objeto, nas suas evocações, nas suas histórias (de)compostas e ainda por compor. Exige-nos um outro tipo de olhar, para nós, para o outro, cuja natureza talvez esteja ainda por ser definida, mas que sem dúvida nos inquieta. E é esta inquietação que Ana Vidigal consegue ativar através da reconfiguração de materiais na sua obra e nos seus livros de artista em particular — resquícios — da cultura popular e familiar de Portugal que formam um arquivo subterrâneo que

¹¹ ‘O abrir caixas para mim é uma coisa fascinante, porque tenho essa memória de infância, de abrir caixas e gavetas.’ Ana Vidigal em entrevista a Susana Pomba in Brito e Dinis 2009: 13.

¹² Para os países africanos que então lutavam pelo fim do processo de colonização, o conflito é referido como Guerras da Libertação.

remete a um antes e a um depois da ditadura, mostrando que a crítica cultural e política do pós-ditadura não é unicamente matéria do passado, mas também uma ‘história de regressos’ (Ribeiro 2004), ou uma história que se expande no presente a partir da memória e das ruínas dessa memória.

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ABSTRACT

As in other Latin American countries, post-avant-garde artistic practices in Chile suffered the impact of a ferocious dictatorship. Forced to resist censorship and prosecution, they were often connected to positions of political dissent, showing a desire to reclaim public spaces and involve spectators in the production of meaning. Despite these difficulties, artist publishing under Pinochet underwent a period of extremely rich experimentation. Examining the period following the advent of democracy, this essay analyses some examples of artistic initiatives from the so-called '1990s generation': publications by the collectives Jemmy Button Inc. and Muro Sur, and one of the works by Voluspa Jarpa, who was a member of both groups.

keywords

1990S GENERATION
JEMMY BUTTON INC.
MURO SUR
ARTISTS PUBLISHING
POST-DICTATORIAL CHILE
CRISTIÁN SILVA
MÓNICA BENGOA
JUSTO PASTOR MELLADO
IVÁN NAVARRO
VOLUSPA JARPA

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Beyond the Book, but Still Attached:

Publishing by Artists in Chile in the 1990s and 2000s

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*¿Hasta dónde puedo llegar? Yo viajo en
un viaje sin rumbo y voy a chocar...¹*

Tiro de Gracia

The background: artist's publishing in Chile during the dictatorship

In Chile, the expansion of conceptual art took place relatively quickly. Art historian Mari Carmen Ramírez (2000: 373) has pointed out that conceptual practices in the arts started spreading in Latin America in two phases: first, roughly between 1960 and 1974, when conceptual artworks similar to those being made at the time in the United States, Europe and Japan also appeared in Brazil and Argentina; and then, from 1975 onwards, alongside its international unfolding, where its development could also be detected in some more countries of Latin America, including Chile. According to Ramírez, this second phase was distinguished by a 'vast rearticulation of conceptual practices in terms of both the appropriation of urban spaces and attempts to involve popular audiences in their proposals' (Ramírez 2000: 373).² Given Chile's specific political and social context at the time, with the country ruled by a violent and repressive dictatorship, aspirations such as regaining public spaces for art and capturing the attention of the general public — beyond

¹ 'How far can I go? I'm travelling on a journey without a destination and I'm going to crash...' Fragment of the lyrics of *Viaje sin rumbo* [Journey without a destination], one of the songs on the album *Ser humano*, released in 1997 by the Chilean hip hop band Tiro de Gracia.

² Unless otherwise specified, all translations are by the author.

the art community — took on a profile of their own and a particularly penetrating significance.

Running parallel to the development of conceptual art, artists in Chile also experienced a broadening of perspectives that allowed printed formats to be incorporated into the range of possibilities available to them: the Chilean avant-garde scene of the 1960s and 1970s manifested a serious interest in the printed page as a medium for visual creation, in the continuity between visuality and writing in intellectual reflection, and in the ephemeral and non-auratic nature of printed formats. While this interest differed from the tradition of the ‘artist’s book’ that had started to take shape in the 1960s, particularly in the English-speaking world, it was nevertheless intensely productive and had its own specific attributes.

In their desire to work with printed formats, Chilean visual artists were aligning with photographers — who had always considered the book to be one of the most appropriate media for the circulation of their visual work — as well as with their contemporary writers and poets. The latter had inherited a powerful tradition of experimentation that had been consolidated since the 1950s and would bear fruit in works such as *La nueva novela* [The New Novel] by Juan Luis Martínez (1977), or the first poetry books by Raúl Zurita, *Purgatorio* [Purgatory] (1979) and *Anteparaíso* [Before Paradise] (1982). As Argentinian art historian Andrea Giunta has pointed out, the most striking feature of the Chilean scene lies precisely in the very close connection that was established in those years between the artistic and literary scenes:

The Chilean case has no Latin American equivalent. That is why it should be studied as a unique, distinct model within the fluidity of the process of globalisation in art. Although it stems from theoretical references that can be found in all writing on contemporary art, these served to create a different terrain, in which the texts occurred at the same time, before or immediately after the works, leaving their meaning vacant, incomplete, always happening again. The open nature of writing about art makes the texts available, offering the possibility of intervention on the basis of what the other postulates (Giunta 2010: 22-23).

Such an intimate link between art and literature unfolded in a rich and sophisticated publishing production, as well as in a dense network of personal relationships that connected the protagonists of both scenes. The resulting network not only provided its members with mutual intellectual stimulation and freedom of expression in spite of the difficult external circumstances, but also — and equally relevant — with a feeling of protection or refuge. As artist Carlos Altamirano would later

declare, '[t]o a certain extent, art lent its space to politics, inventing a way of speaking politically without talking about politics' (Altamirano quoted in Galende 2007: 269). Art and literature thus converged in a crossroads where it was possible to resist and oppose, albeit always in subtle and indirect ways, so as not to fall into the trap of making overly explicit provocations that could attract censorship or punishment.

This way of 'speaking politically', also described as 'opaque textuality' (Giunta 2010: 14-15), was certainly left undefined or vague in order to avoid censorship, but it also opened up multiple possible meanings, thereby gaining a degree of freedom in an otherwise suffocating and closed environment. More than a matter of style, expressive indeterminacy was often a necessary reaction to dictatorial oppression. In Giunta's words:

The practice of writing as an act of resistance. Writing in a condition of opaque textuality, but writing, nonetheless. Thinking. Because if there was one thing the dictatorship wanted to do, it was to obliterate the possibility that any meaning could still be realised. The form of writing as an oppositional gesture and its openness as a way of keeping meaning vacant, to leave open the possibility of thinking everything again, everything from the beginning (Giunta 2010: 14-15).

While textual ambiguity, which both obscures the meaning and has the potential to project it in multiple directions, is characteristic of a significant number of publications by Chilean visual artists produced under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, many of these publications also share another significant feature: an ephemeral materiality. Their perishable nature can either be due to the fragility of their material support (sometimes just a simple leaflet) or emanate from the very conditions of circulation of the medium where they are made to exist. Many artists' interventions in everyday communication channels, expressively referred to as 'critical interferences' by art historian and writer Nelly Richard (1979: 13), had a very short existence — in the case of newspapers, barely 24 hours. After that, they were immediately discarded as waste and, as such, doomed to be lost in the final stage of the life cycle of the publications in which they had been made public. See, for instance, the self-denominated *acciones de prensa*, or 'press actions', carried out by Colectivo Acciones de Arte (C.A.D.A.) in the 1980s, consisting of insertions in daily newspapers or mass-circulation magazines.

Some sections in art magazines were explicitly devoted to presenting visual interventions by artists, thereby creating the proper conditions for such 'critical interferences' to circulate. This certainly had an impact, since, between 1979 and

the early 1980s, magazines played a particularly important role in the Chilean neo-avant-garde art scene. Among the periodicals that most eagerly lent themselves to this function was the magazine *CAL* (an acronym for ‘Coordinación Artística Latinoamericana’ or ‘Latin American Artistic Coordination’), published by the eponymous gallery between June and November 1979.³ Directed by Luz Pereira, founder and director of the gallery, and designed by visual artist Teresa Gunther, *CAL* magazine was conceived from the outset as a medium with a dual function: as a tool for disseminating information through articles that presented or commented on the art, literature and music scenes both in Chile and internationally; and as a space for artistic creation.

The latter function was performed in one of the sections that structured the magazine. In this section, as Gunther would later explain, the idea was to ask artists ‘to create an original artwork, just for the magazine and that only works in the magazine. The artwork was conceived exclusively for those pages *and then disappeared*’ (Gunther quoted in Raveau 2013: 54; emphasis added).

The first contribution to this section in *CAL* bore the eloquent title ‘Aproximaciones al concepto de ocupar la página de una publicación de arte como medio para el arte’ [Approaches to the Concept of Occupying the Page of an Art Publication as an Art Medium] and was signed by Nelly Richard. It consisted of a short text in which Richard advocated awareness of the physical aspects — typographical, compositional, and textual — of the printed page and its potential as a material for creative use. Based on the relationship between the authenticity of the work of art and the here and now postulated by Walter Benjamin, Richard proposed in her text to consider the publication ‘as a place of occupation by art, in terms of presentation and not re/presentation,’ and also ‘as a mechanism that is not reproductive but productive of art,’ given that it was in the ‘situation/publication where the process of collectivisation of art had to be produced and consumed’ (Richard 1979: 13). Richard’s definition describes, in a sense, many of the experimental practices in print that took place in Chile during the dictatorship. In these practices, certainly, the aim was to *occupy* a space understood as public — particularly media such as newspapers and magazines, but also other ephemeral supports such as posters and leaflets — and use it for *production* (rather than mere reproduction), because such space offered greater flexibility, and its reach could be wide enough to secure the printed artwork a good circulation — in Richard’s words, to guarantee its ‘process of collectivisation.’

³ *CAL*. 1979. Issues 1–4 (June, July, August and November). The director of issues 3 and 4 was Luz Pereira, and the editor was Nelly Richard.

Mutation of sensitivity: new forms of publishing since 1989

In the early 1980s, Pinochet's government established a new Constitution, draughted by the dictatorship and approved in a referendum whose results were illegally rigged.⁴ From that year onwards, despite harsh repression, citizen protests against the dictatorship intensified. In 1988, the state of emergency that had been in force since the 1973 coup d'état was finally suspended and, in accordance with the provisions of the 1980 Constitution, a referendum was called to elect a president. Although Pinochet had appointed himself as the only candidate, the 'No' vote, advocated by most of the opposition parties grouped together in a grand coalition won by a large margin and the dictator lost the referendum.

Thus began a complex and painful transition to democracy, which was consolidated in 1989 when Patricio Aylwin, the Christian Democratic Party candidate, won the first free presidential elections held in the country since 1970. However, Aylwin's election marked only a partial break with the dictatorship: although he took office as president in 1990, Pinochet retained supreme command of the Chilean army until the end of the decade, and many officials of the Pinochet dictatorship continued to hold public office and positions in the new government.⁵

Immediately after democracy was reinstated in 1989, Chilean society experienced a rapid transformation (though, given the continuity of part of Pinochet's regime, it is questionable how profound this transformation actually was). Among other improvements, freedom of ideology and expression was restored, and political persecution disappeared. The slow process of healing the social, emotional, intellectual, and cultural rifts caused by the dictatorship began: a process that was — and continues to be — experienced differently by those who suffered first-hand (both in Chile and in exile) and those who, belonging to later generations, did not have to endure the dictatorship itself, but grew up under its sinister legacy.

From 1989 on, visual artists who had been active during the previous fifteen years quickly perceived how the limitations that had impacted on the potential development of their practice gradually disappeared. Real possibilities to carry out projects that would have been impracticable under the dictatorship opened up. And yet, institutional or commercial structures aimed at supporting art practices and making resources available to creators did not come into existence so fast; indeed, a structural network of support would take quite some time to develop.⁶

In turn, the so-called 'generation of the 1990s' — those artists who began their professional practice in the years following the end of the dictatorship and the restoration of democracy — perceived this post-dictatorial period differently, since their awareness of their own position in the world had certainly changed.

⁴ This Constitution remains in force today, although it has undergone some seventy reforms, almost all of which were approved after 1990, in the democratic period.

⁵ In 1991, the Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación [National Truth and Reconciliation Commission], created by the Chilean government two years earlier, published its report on the savage repression carried out by the military dictatorship. Despite the controversy caused by the harshness of the criminal acts revealed in the report, Pinochet retained his military rank until 1998, when he relinquished it to be appointed, the following day, senator for life, a move that led to intense protests. A few months later, Pinochet was arrested in London at the request of Spanish judge Baltasar Garzón, who had issued an international arrest warrant accusing him of genocide. He was released in 2000 due to dementia, and returned to Chile, where the diagnosis was confirmed, prompting his resignation from the senate. Augusto Pinochet died in Santiago in 2006, never having faced trial for these charges.

⁶ The lack of supporting structures forced artists to work in precarious conditions, in which persistence and inventiveness were almost the only way to carry out projects. For example, in order to be able to take the photographs that would turn into one of the most celebrated Chilean photobooks of the second half of the 20th century, *El infarto del alma* [Heart Attack of the Soul] (Eltit and Errázuriz 1994), Paz Errázuriz had to finance the project with her own resources — and made use of creative solutions such as exchanging a portrait of the director of the psychiatric hospital where she would be photographing for permission to reside with the inmates for some time. I am grateful to Martín La Roche for sharing this anecdote about Errázuriz with me.

Among other aspects, their expectations about the possibilities that printed matter could offer them when used as a medium for visual art had been reshaped. On the one hand, artists now felt more entitled to take on an active and productive role in the institutional — or at least pseudo-institutional — legitimisation of their own practices, adopting discursive analysis and theoretical comment while they continued to work with visuality. On the other hand, the absence of truly democratic art institutions that support their work and ensure its visibility was a shortcoming, but for some of them it seemed plausible to overcome, at least partially, by using printed media as a form of para-institutional, or para-legitimising, device.

Technological advances also played a significant role in this change of perspective, as they were slowly beginning to challenge the previously unquestionable solidity and intellectual authority of the book as a container and transmitter of knowledge. It was in around 1990 when access to domestic digital devices — personal computers, the first (still rudimentary) desktop publishing software, and the home printers a bit later on — began to spread throughout the Western world. Although it would take another decade for the use of these technologies to become truly widespread, it was at that time that the relation and interaction with books began to change inexorably, just as the symbolic values associated with the printed word were mutating. This trend was incipient and difficult to detect at first, but over time it would only strengthen. Considering this change in the attitude towards books and print retrospectively, Chilean artist Voluspa Jarpa, who had begun her Fine Arts studies in Santiago in the very year that Pinochet lost the referendum — and whose work is discussed in greater depth below — accurately observed in 2018 that the book was now ‘an object that is becoming technically obsolete’ (Jarpa quoted in Pérez Rubio 2018: 32), and that ‘the end of certain ideological projects related to printing and the precepts of the encyclopaedia, with a technological system that closes with the book’ was approaching (2018: 33).⁷

However, in 1989, these processes were still in their early stages. Books and other printed matter had not yet lost their symbolic prestige; on the contrary, at the time, eventually free from the restrictions imposed by the dictatorship, they seemed ideal channels for the dissemination of the artistic positions of the new generations.

Jemmy Button Inc. (1994–1995)

Very soon after 1989, artist-driven publishing initiatives emerged in which, instead of delegating the presentation of their work to third parties, artists themselves wrote the theoretical texts in the first person or took on the role of compilers and editors. Notable in this regard are the two publications edited by the Jemmy Button

⁷ In the same conversation, Jarpa pointed out that the expansion of digital media was also shifting the meaning of the concept of authorship and, therefore, intellectual authority, as they had been understood until the 1990s (Pérez Rubio 2018: 33). This transformation, in fact, has not yet been completed, but the recent explosion of Artificial Intelligence-based tools seems to have sped it up.

Inc. group in the mid-1990s: *Deficit Club* (1994), and *Taxonomías (Textos de artistas)* [Taxonomies (Texts by Artists)] (1995).

Jemmy Button Inc. was the name under which artists Mónica Bengoa (1969), Mario Navarro (1970), and Cristián Silva (1969), and art critic Justo Pastor Mellado (1949), all born in Santiago de Chile, signed the curatorial authorship of a collective exhibition presented in the Netherlands in November 1994.⁸ The name was inspired by a historical figure, a native of Tierra del Fuego from the nomadic Yaghan ethnic group who, in 1830, when he was about fifteen years old, was bought by the crew of Darwin's ship, the Beagle, and taken to England. There he learned English, became familiar with English customs, and came into contact with the country's elites, even being presented at the court of William IV before being taken back to Tierra del Fuego in 1831.

Button's life story was of course exemplary of the alienation that results from colonial extractivist desires, but it was in particular the successive processes of estrangement and cultural assimilation that he was forced to undergo, both on arriving in England and on returning to his native region, which seemed to Bengoa, Navarro, and Silva specifically suited to symbolise the difficulties they were experiencing first-hand during the preparations for their project in the Netherlands.⁹ Throughout this process, they were constantly faced with a double paradox: firstly, despite having been educated in Chile, their solid academic background had been entirely shaped by European cultural and artistic traditions; secondly, regardless of such education, their Chilean birthplace and upbringing prompted Dutch institutions to exoticise their work by inertia, without evaluating the cultural and artistic genealogy to which their actual practice belonged.

For Bengoa, Navarro, and Silva, such contradictions only served to highlight the problems inherent in every process of cultural assimilation. Accordingly, they chose to ground both the exhibition and the publication that they produced in the Netherlands — whose title was inspired by the difficulties they had encountered in obtaining funding for their project — in the opportunities for reinvention of one's own identity through the practice of art and writing such processes entail. It is no coincidence that the introductory text to *Deficit Club*, written by Mellado, is entitled 'The Darwinism of Curatorship on Latin American Art'. In this text, Mellado sharply states that:

[the mission of] this study and artistic production group is to put on stage — visually and textually — models of artistic significance; that is, minimal narrative units describing 'eventful' situations whose plots dismantle the *bon savage* honesty of intercontinental artistic relations (Mellado 1994: 6; emphasis in the original).

⁸ 'Deficit Club' was held at three consecutive venues: The Royal Academy of Fine Arts, The Hague and AKI of Enschedelt featured works by Natalia Babarovic, Paul Beuchat, Sybil Brintrup, Francisca García, Waldo Gómez, Nury González, Claudio Herrera, Voluspa Jarpa, Pablo Langlois, Carlos Montes de Oca, Iván Navarro, Carlos Navarrete, Mario Soro, Rosa Velasco, José Luis Villaplana, Alicia Villareal, and Ximena Zomosa. The accompanying publication is reviewed in the references section of this article. See Jemmy Button Inc. 1994.

⁹ I am enormously grateful to Ana María Fernández for sharing this information with me, as well as much of the narrative that follows: my account of the history of Jemmy Button Inc. and Muro Sur draws heavily on her generous comments.

The difficulties Bengoa, Navarro, and Silva had to face in the Netherlands were far from anecdotal; rather, they reflected a complex problem, related both to the way their generation of artists — more cosmopolitan than Chilean artists of previous generations — projected its position on the international art scene, and to the links that they believed existed between themselves and their immediate predecessors. Chilean curator Paula Solimano has pointed out that ‘Jemmy Button Inc. [...] artists were interested in circulating in global contemporary art not as *children* of the Latin American leftist printmaking of the 1960s, but as Latin American artists interested in printmaking in their own right’ (Solimano quoted in Halart 2022; emphasis in the original). Solimano suggests that both the exhibition and the publications produced by the Jemmy Button Inc. collective were explicitly or implicitly related to ‘the notion of *bastardism*, [...] the absence of an origin, both in their works and in their management’ (Solimano quoted in Halart 2022; emphasis in the original).

Actually, instances of a similar *bastardism* could also be found in other contemporary collective initiatives. That is the case of the art gallery Galería Chilena (‘Galchi’), active between 1997 and 2005 and that, contrary to standard models of gallery work, did not have its own premises. In fact, Galchi-organised exhibitions temporarily appropriated spaces outside the art world, such as the entrances to corporate buildings or certain real estate projects.

The second book published by Jemmy Button Inc., *Taxonomías (Textos de artistas)*, brought together a compendium of essays written by seventeen artists in a ‘political gesture of self-knowledge and understanding of their work.’¹⁰ While *Taxonomías* was quite conventional in its form, its most original feature was that the compilation of discursive approaches that underpinned the practice of a number of artists it presented had actually been promoted by other visual artists, rather than historians or theorists. In this sense, *Taxonomías* was a preamble to Bengoa, Navarro and Silva’s next publishing endeavour, *Muro Sur — Artes Visuales* [Southern Wall — Visual Arts].

Muro Sur (1994-2004)

The preparations for ‘Deficit Club’ in the Netherlands in 1994 brought Bengoa, Navarro, and Silva into contact with lawyer Ana María Fernández Parodi, who had been working as cultural attaché at the Chilean Embassy in Amsterdam since 1990. Through her work, Fernández had previously met artist Eugenio Dittborn when he was spending a few months in the city to prepare a solo exhibition at the Witte de With.¹¹ In Santiago, among other projects, Dittborn had been part of V.I.S.U.A.L.

¹⁰ Centro Nacional de Arte Contemporáneo Cerillos (blog of the National Art Centre). 2018. ‘Aires de cambio: los 90.’ <https://centronacionaldearte.cultura.gob.cl/aires-de-cambiolos90/>.

¹¹ Eugenio Dittborn, *MAPA*, Witte de With, 11 December 1993–30 January 1994, curated by Chris Dercon, Barbera van Kooij and Jack van Mildert.



Fig. 1 Installing the exhibition 'Fotografía Reciente Paz Errázuriz' at Muro Sur, Santiago, 1998. Photo Paz Errázuriz. Courtesy of Ana María Fernández and Paz Errázuriz.

alongside Ronald Kay (Hamburg, 1941 — Santiago, 2017) and Catalina Parra (Santiago, 1940). V.I.S.U.A.L. was a publishing imprint which issued a number of highly experimental artist publications between 1976 and 1979. At the time, Dittborn was also a university professor of printmaking in Santiago, and Bengoa, Navarro, and Silva had all attended his classes. He thus acted as a bridge, connecting the three artists with Fernández in order to promote their travelling exhibition 'Deficit Club' in the Netherlands.

Later on, in 1996, when Fernández decided to return to Chile with his partner, writer, photographer, and professor Ricardo Cuadros, they settled in a flat in Plaza Brasil, located in a popular neighbourhood in central Santiago. Shortly afterwards, during the opening night of an exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts,¹² Fernández met a group of young artists, including Silva. In the conversation that followed, they expressed their complaints about art institutions in the country, lamenting their lack of receptiveness to their work and their unwillingness to abandon the prejudices of the dictatorship era, which continued to exert pressure through inherited structures and personnel. Fernández spontaneously responded by offering them a space inside her own flat, specifically the *muro sur*, that is, the 'southern wall', which was approximately four metres wide and seven metres high.

So it was that, starting in that informal conversation, the self-managed and fluid artist's collective Muro Sur was born. Muro Sur operated from 1994 to 2004, bringing together a diverse and intergenerational group of artists for whom Fernández, in addition to space, provided organisational support and help. Artist Mario Navarro recalls that 'there weren't many independent initiatives in Chile at that time', and emphasises that for him, the most distinctive feature of Muro Sur was its 'lightness' of operation: the group of artists who ran it never felt the desire to create a well-structured collective, but rather 'came and went, they didn't always exhibit together...' (Navarro quoted in Bengoa 2019).

In its early days, as some sort of exercise of 'reconnection' with the previous generation of artists, Muro Sur organised five solo exhibitions dedicated to key figures in the Chilean visual arts — Eugenio Dittborn, Eduardo Vilches, Paz Errázuriz, Gonzalo Díaz and Carlos Altamirano — all warmly welcomed by the art community [Fig. 1]. Soon after that, the original venue was expanded by adding the basement of the same three-storey building, in order to meet the technical demands of some artists. Not all artists decided to continue — from then on, rent had to be paid for the space — but those who did created a structure of committees which would be responsible for curating, design, communication, and all other aspects of a new series of exhibitions, debates, and other activities held in that basement.

One of the fundamental criteria for defining the curatorial programme of Muro Sur was to 'invent exhibitions to which one would like to be invited.'¹³ This was

¹² Gonzalo Díaz, 'Unidos en la gloria y en la muerte' [United in Glory and Death] exhibition. Matta Room, National Museum of Fine Arts, Santiago, December 1997–January 1998.

¹³ Fernández in conversation with the author, August 2025. Unless another source is indicated, the description of Muro Sur's activities that follows comes from the same conversation.

how proposals were gathered, and then the most popular ones were chosen by vote. It was artist Nury González who came up with the idea for the collective exhibition 'El objeto y su par' [The Object and its Pair], in which each work of art was associated with an everyday object. In 'El lugar no ideal' [The Non-Ideal Place], artists had to present works in spaces that were not exactly ideal for art exhibitions — Claudio Correa, for example, exhibited a figurative painting depicting a battle in the toilet of the venue. In the exhibition 'Grandes paños' [Large Surfaces], in turn, participating artists had to create works which would cover completely the wall assigned to them; etc.

Artist Gonzalo Díaz recalled: 'Behind [the project] was always a way of producing work effectively, that is, works could leave the studio where they were made and reach an audience, even if it was a small one' (Bengoa 2019). For Díaz, one of the strengths of the project lay in its ability to create a community around the programme and activities, something that, after the extreme fragmentation that Chilean society had been forced into during the dictatorship, required a certain amount of effort, but at the same time satisfied an urgent demand of the new democratic era.

In 1999, Muro Sur began publishing a large-format periodical similar to a newspaper — although printed on thicker paper — which would become, over the next three years, the main tool for the dissemination of the group's discursive and visual elaborations [Fig. 2]. *Muro Sur — Artes Visuales* might be better described as an art magazine made by artists than as an artist's publication aiming to constitute itself as an artwork. Three different issues of the periodical would eventually be published. The cover of the first, which appeared in November 1999, included a detailed statement of purpose:

Muro Sur — Artes Visuales is a response to the need to create a stable space that allows for the development of all cultural activities related to the production of contemporary art.

Muro Sur — Artes Visuales is a response to the need to create a local space capable of housing artwork focused on the signs, conflicts, particularities, dissonance, mixture, and sensitivity of our cultural identity.

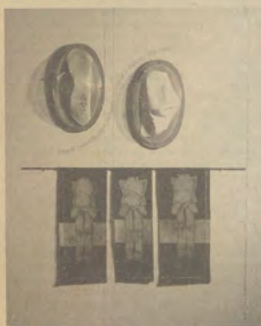
Muro Sur — Artes Visuales is an invention of contemporary artists who come from different backgrounds, who have diverse interests and artistic proposals, but who require a common space for discussion, reflection, and criticism.

Muro Sur — Artes Visuales was created to foster the connection and tension between the various manifestations and modes of appropriation of symbolic spaces, of the new art forms that have recently emerged in the form of small clans scattered throughout the different local exhibition circuits... (Muro Sur 1999: 1).

MURO SUR

artes visuales

Nº 1, noviembre de 1999



María Victoria Palacios, *Series: abstracción con la estructura formal de la materia* (1998, media mixed, 80 x 100 cm, 4/10).

Muro Sur - Artes Visuales se debe a la necesidad de crear un espacio estable que permita el desarrollo de todas las actividades culturales afines con la producción del arte contemporáneo.

Muro Sur - Artes Visuales se debe a la necesidad de crear un espacio local capaz de albergar un trabajo de arte concentrado en los signos, conflictos, particularidades, disonancia, mixtura y sensibilidad de nuestra identidad cultural.

Muro Sur - Artes Visuales es una invención de artistas contemporáneos que provienen de distintas matrices, que poseen diversos intereses y propuestas de obra, pero que requieren de un espacio común de discusión, reflexión y crítica.

Muro Sur - Artes Visuales ha sido creado para propiciar la

conexión y tensión de las diversas manifestaciones y modos de apropiación de los espacios simbólicos, de las nuevas formas de arte que se presentan recientemente bajo la forma de pequeños clanes dispersos en los distintos circuitos de exhibición local.

Muro Sur - Artes Visuales ha sido creado para superar una carencia al interior del espacio cultural chileno. Esto se refiere al rol desarrollado por las galerías chilenas comerciales con respecto a las artes visuales contemporáneas. Dichas galerías han priorizado aquellos lenguajes que se relacionan con la 'tradición de las bellas artes', postergando las prácticas más experimentales.

Muro Sur - Artes Visuales es una apuesta para desmentir la veracidad del mito referido

al desinterés general del público chileno, aquel conjunto de espectadores para los cuales están formuladas las obras, las preguntas y las respuestas.

Muro Sur - Artes Visuales se propone crear una instancia situada en la intersección de los espacios tradicionales de muestra -los institucionales y los comerciales- acorde con las necesidades del arte contemporáneo, desarrollando un espacio multifórmico que cuenta, por un lado, con una galería, y por otro, con proyectos de intervención de espacios públicos y privados.

Muro Sur - Artes Visuales ha sido creado para exhibir el trabajo de pares artistas cuyas obras constituyan un aporte relevante y significativo dentro del proyecto general del desarrollo del arte chileno de vanguardia.

La Ilusión después de la Desilusión

A propósito de Étant donné...

Velutga Jerga

Esta obra pretende ser una lectura posible de la última obra de Marcel Duchamp -Étant donné...- entendida como la producción artificial de una imagen versátil. Imagen elaborada a partir de un dispositivo objetivo que se transforma en la fusión de un fragmento escénico.

La versatilidad se percibe en artificios que se presentan como posibles. En la visualidad, aquello que es imaginariamente una posibilidad de constituir realidad. Esto que es una sensación, necesariamente lleva a una segunda etapa, posterior a la ilusión y esto se traduce en una sensación de realidad ficticia que posteriormente estará marcada por una segunda etapa, derivada de la ilusión, y que consiste en la constatación de la materialidad en cuanto verdad de lo que se ve. Esto es la etapa de la desilusión. Y se manifestará como la dilatación de la imagen a partir de la toma de conciencia del artificio de la representación. Luego de esto ya no se estará frente a una imagen sino participando de la construcción de una.

En Étant donné... se asiste a una escena que es de difícil aprehensión instantánea. La ausencia de la captación inmediata se debe a que no existe un solo punto fíctico y hay un aparente desorden, lo que obliga a recorrer la imagen. Esto implica para el espectador una determinada actitud corporal de quietud y un dispositivo sensorial de contemplación, entendiendo que la contemplación consciente requiere de un cierto estado de suspensión de los juicios y percepciones e prior. En esta disposición surge una sospecha. Nada es casual, todo ha sido cuidadosamente dispuesto. La mirada vuelve a recorrer la escena pero esta

vez para dilucidar la trampa, el artificio y la armazón.

Lo que logra Duchamp es la producción de una imagen que, se instala en el imaginario del que la ve, mediante el juego de la negación de la referencialidad literaria y narrativa, obligando al que la percibe a sufrir la experiencia de la obra en la búsqueda de sentido. La obligatoriedad de permanecer en ella, a pesar de las dificultades de sentido, se debe a la seducción y goce que produce esta apariencia. La imposibilidad de cerrar la anecdota sumada a la precisión formal que se transforma en la precisión conceptual es lo que produce la experiencia estética de la obra.

La ejecución, la superficie, el volumen, es lo que le permite presentar la escena en un nivel de apariencia o de apariciones momentáneas y fragmentadas. A través del recorrido visual de la obra, lo que vemos en esta escena aparente, es solamente eso, la apariencia de una escena. En realidad la imposibilidad de salir como una totalidad se debe al hecho de que ella ha sido



Marcel Duchamp, *Étant donné... 1º et 2º état d'été, 2º et 3º état d'été* (1917, 1º et 2º état d'été, 2º et 3º état d'été).

construida a través de estos pequeños detalles realistas independientes entre sí, pero desplegados en la representación de un espacio unívoco de coherencia lumínica.

Esto hace imposible no sentir, con mayor o menor grado, de que ciertamente son fragmentos que han sido sumados para crear una imagen versátil como totalidad estética. No queda, en el armado, totalmente borrada la fragmentación a la que pertenecen. Ella se manifiesta en la imposibilidad de cerrar semánticamente la obra, y esto no es un error o falta de su autor sino más bien la claridad conceptual manifiesta en el procedimiento de creación de la imagen versátil.

En este caso la versatilidad no está dada solamente por la apariencia realista de la obra sino también por una necesidad erótica del propio espectador que transformará este fragmento de cuerpo en su objeto de deseo, del deseo de observar todo, en ser visto, aquello que se transforma en una imagen transgresora, y que luego traspasará el imaginario del espectador soñador como decía Duchamp, "son los mirados los que hacen los cuadros".



Rodrigo Méndez, *in situ* (1998, fotografía de la obra sobre un escritorio, pintura y objetos, 200 x 300 cm).

visuales. Me refiere a esta función binaria de ABRIR y CERRAR espacios de significación de manera simultánea.

La puerta implica una construcción irónica, mediante la elaboración de un objeto ambiguo. Las puertas entre la función de abrir y cerrar, pero en el despliegue del espacio-tiempo, pueden solamente estar abiertas, cerradas o entreabiertas, y no podrán cumplir simultáneamente ambas funciones opuestas. La obra en este caso, no consiste tan sólo en el objeto material, sino en aquello que queda establecido a partir del mismo: el significado y su extensión simbólica.

Duchamp será el artista que con mayor precisión ampliará los límites formales y conceptuales del arte a principios del siglo. El objeto industrial variado de uso común puede ser considerado arte si es empleado en un espacio que lo prive de su funcionalidad. Pero también el gesto de arte o la idea estarán incluidos en estas ampliaciones significativas.

Esto lleva consigo un cambio en los parámetros y cánones artísticos. Duchamp, en muchos de sus escritos se refiere con gran desprecio al goce sensorial y refutano que produce la pintura, especialmente la impresionista, tanto en el pintor

Fig. 2 Muro Sur — Artes visuales, cover of issue no. 1, November 1999. Courtesy of Ana María Fernández.

The list of reasons and objectives of the initiative continued by underlining the absence, in the Chilean cultural fabric of the time, of spaces in which experimental practices could become visible, stating the participating artists' desire, with this publication, to position themselves halfway between museums and other institutional spaces on the one hand, and commercial art galleries on the other.

The complaint about what the group perceived as a lack of interest on the part of official art institutions in supporting Chilean younger artists was to be a recurrent underlying theme in *Muro Sur — Artes Visuales*. The first issue of the series included a study by Silva (1999: 7-8) on artist-managed spaces that existed in Chile outside the institutional framework [Fig. 3]. Silva started by pointing out that some of these spaces had been inspired by two performances from the 1980s, both of which took creative advantage of the precarious situation and institutional shortcomings that prevailed in the country at that time. These actions consisted of the brief occupation of an abandoned hospital by Lotty Rosenfeld¹⁴ and the equally short-lived occupation of a newly built house by Carlos Altamirano (Silva 2000: 7).¹⁵

Among the agents and spaces that Silva listed were Ian Szydlowsky, a visual artist and DJ who in 1996 initiated Casa Tomada [Squatted House], for which he temporarily occupied a villa that was about to be demolished; thirteen artists from Valparaíso, with Vanessa Vásquez as general coordinator, who temporarily occupied an office in the city's financial centre to set up a short-lived project which they called, appropriating customs vocabulary, *Pertrechos / Ordnance* (1998); and a group of recently graduated artists who, in 1999, in Santiago de Chile, undertook a self-management and self-promotion campaign under the name Casasucia [Dirty-house] (Silva 2000: 7). A reference was also made to Galería Chilena — 'Galchi', the project that, among all of them, would ultimately achieve the greatest stability and permanence. Galchi had been created by artists Joe Villablanca, Felipe Mújica, and Diego Fernández and, as has been previously explained, consisted of a commercial partnership without headquarters, that is, with a nomadic nature. According to Silva, 'in comparison to conventional galleries, [Galchi] denotes a flexibility and agility similar to those of a hunting and fruit-gathering tribe compared to an agricultural community' (Silva 2000: 8).

The third issue of *Muro Sur — Artes Visuales* was not published in Santiago but in New York as part of the 'As a Satellite' programme organised by the Visual Arts Department of the Americas Society. Subtitled *Backyard*, it appeared on 11 September 2003, that is, thirty years after the coup d'état that had overthrown the government of Salvador Allende in Chile, and two years after the attack on the Twin Towers in New York. The front and back covers of this issue were illustrated with large photographs referring to both events [Fig. 4a, 4b].

¹⁴ The video installation *Cautivos* [Captives] was made by Lotty Rosenfeld on 2 December 1989 at the Ochagavía Hospital, an unfinished building that was never completed; for more information, see Fundación Lotty Roselfeld. n.d. 'Video Instalación Cautivos.' <https://fundacionlottyrosenfeld.org/coleccion/fondo-lotty-rosenfeld/actividad-artistica/video-instalacion-cautivos-interior-hospital-inconcluso/>.

¹⁵ The performance (title and date unknown) by Carlos Altamirano consisted of the occupation of a house under construction in the La Florida neighbourhood of Santiago, Chile.

MURO SUR

artes visuales

Nº 2, junio del 2000



Patricia Cepeda, *Imbanché*, 1996, video, Inst. Antares 23 min. Colección de la artista

Antípodas

Durante abril Patricia Cepeda y Juan Céspedes presentaron sendas instalaciones en Muro Sur. El hilván que permitió trazar una comunión entre las obras fue el uso del video. Eso sí, desde intenciones tan opuestas como el título de la muestra sugiere.

Por Elizabeth Neira

Una mujer de cara encolada y vestida con una camisa de vaporoso nylon saca de su boca metros de cuerda matizados con persavescos durante largos minutos. Con el cordel enmalvido se afana atando dos figuritas de porcelana, a las que luego agrega unas hebras que parecen algas y finalmente los trozos cristalizados de la máscara facial de cola fría. Terminado el curioso paquete concluye el video y el televisor comenta de nuevo con la rara ceremonia. Esta es una parte de *Limpieza* la obra que Patricia Cepeda exhibió en Muro Sur. A la cinta sumó un bordado, el objeto creado con las porcelanas y la cola partido en dos y otro objeto encontrado en el transcurso de la exposición, practicando una obra poliforma que integra lenguajes diversos: el bordado, analógico y manual, la instalación, la acción performática y el video.

Cepeda habla de procesos. Observada con el correr del tiempo y su huella, la estructura cíclica de los acontecimientos intenta insuflar su puesta en escena de esa temporalidad. No quiere que el trabajo del artista se convierta "en un cóctel pasiflorado en la gástrica" así que la exposición se convierte en un trance, una estación de la obra, pero no la definitiva.

Limpieza comienza entonces mucho antes del día de su amolamiento en Muro Sur y termina después. Es decir Cepeda intenta hacer con su trabajo una *limpia* (personal). Esta historia se remonta a un año atrás, cuando la artista realizó la acción performática a la que llamó *Imbanché*. "Imbanché es una pulbera en lengua nativa que significa algo así como un montón de cosas. Ese objeto terminó siendo un enjambre de cosas, unas escatillas, hierbas medicinales que me habían recetado cola. La escena es un cuadro interior con cosas que están a mano. En mi pieza una camisa que es mía, son mis cosas. Esto lo relaciono con un cine - realidad, donde el tiempo y los procesos reales son lo más importante", dice. El resultado es una puesta en escena que bordea el absurdo y lo orgánico, involucrando al espectador en la codificación de lo insólito y apelando sin estridencias a la naptura de cierto pudor. La saliva, la cola, el blanco corchil y el agua en que reposa las hierbas crean una visualidad serena, orgánica e íntima que sitúa a la cámara en una situación de voyeur, de testigo íntimo y privilegiado de operaciones de reclamar. El video en esta cinta es el espejo lúgubre. "Para retratar los propios procesos. No tiene como referente la televisión. Me interesa el video como entidad liberadora, su capacidad de narrar, no su significado social".

Luego y siguiendo con la historia, Cepeda sacó el arriero creado en la acción a la calle y lo fotografió 26 veces cruzando la Alameda. "Esa fue la *Procesión*, otra parte de la obra con la que gané el concurso arte y poesía joven de Valparaíso, en la edición fotográfica".

El bordado y el nido fueron los últimos elementos que Cepeda integró en la obra, la que terminó con el entierro del objeto *Imbanché*. "Mi trabajo tiene que ver con la muerte. En ese sentido me gusta mucho y me siento cercano a Ana Mendicutti. Ella trabaja muy directamente con su cuerpo y su huella. Creo



Patricia Cepeda, *Nido en escudo*, 2000, hilo rojo, punt, plumas, plátano, *Diamantina* variadas

que yo lo hago más a través de huellas difusas. La acción de arte que queda impresa en el video está hecha en un tiempo remoto el que puedo sacar a escena, revivir, ramorar"

en la gástrica con el uso del video. Es este trabajo intencional un vivir la realidad de la exposición desde el cóctel. Establecer un proceso que continúa".

Sin ser declarativa, Patricia Cepeda, con su obsesión por estructurarse en ciclos, el aún ceremonial y casi amatoria en la realización del trabajo de arte, sobrevive y milita en plena postmodernidad operaciones rítmicas de arcaísmo, siguiendo de paso una reflexión crítica acerca de la femineidad y sus roles. La coherencia absurda, el vaporoso atrevido, los tonos apurados del cuadro, el bordado y el nido no pueden ser sino un camino errático de instalación social de un sueño que por lo menos se quede abortado ante las disposiciones históricas del género. "Creo que esta obra resalta un montón de cosas. Su laboreo, cuerpos de la mujer, el trabajo del bordado. Tiene que ver con procesos vitales, traslapes de cosas, pero yo no critico esos roles del género, simplemente estar ahí", concluye.



Patricia Cepeda, *Objeto dividido*, 1999, piezas de mujer y hombre, *Imbanché*, 13 cm. de alto, hilo rojo Colección de la artista

Fig. 3 Muro Sur — Artes visuales, cover of issue no. 2, June 2000. Courtesy of Ana María Fernández.



Fig. 4a, 4b *Muro Sur — Artes Visuales: Backyard*, cover and back cover of issue 3, 11 September 2003. Courtesy of Ana María Fernández.

BAC > YARD

New York, Thursday 11 September, 2003, No. 3

MUROSUR
ARTES VISUALES



SANTIAGO, TUESDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 1973

By being juxtaposed, the photographs on the front and back cover of *Backyard* seem quite similar: both show buildings engulfed in smoke and flames caused by an aggressive attack. In the first text included in this issue, the artists who formed the Muro Sur group expressed their desire to take advantage of this double anniversary so as to stimulate collective reflection on the trauma and pain caused by both attacks. They continued:

Our project is called *Backyard*, and it consists of this publication and an exhibition at the Americas Society [...]. The title *Backyard* comes from the way U.S. government staff referred to Latin America in the late 1960s and the 1970s: Latin America as the United States's backyard.

We thought the best way to publicise *Backyard* would be to infiltrate and imitate the circulation system used by the print communications media. We chose the very day of 11 September to tell you how important it is to talk about, research, and reflect upon traumatic events, and use them to produce something. Indeed, the act of producing has been a lesson that history has undertaken to teach us in Chile. Implicitly and explicitly, we still have a need to reflect on 11 September that took place 30 years ago, a need that has not diminished from generation to generation (Muro Sur 2003: 2).

While setting the publication on the same level as the exhibition — in other words, by aiming to disrupt the usual hierarchy between exhibition and publication, which was an unconventional statement in itself — the authors of these lines explicitly expressed their desire to use the publication as a form of intrusion on mass communication systems. In this sense, their stance was close to the one giving rise to the 'critical interferences' that the C.A.D.A. had carried out a little over a decade earlier with their interventions on printed media. But while the older generation had interfered in already existing newspapers and magazines, the new generation now issued its own 'media', expecting interferences to take place in the process of circulation — ideally, by placing *Muro Sur* alongside news magazines and publications — rather than in the process of composition of news media on the page. Muro Sur's comment on mass media communication was taking place at a certain metalevel, which was in fact reinforced by the textual content of the publication.

Thus, while on the surface *Backyard* was dedicated to reflecting on the two violent events illustrated on its front and back covers, one of the underlying themes that cut through many of the texts published in this issue was precisely mass media communication. To give an example, in one of the contributions, Chilean journalist Andrea Insunza comments on the power of representation of photographs and

their ability to reinforce and weaken memory *at the same time* (Insunza 2003: 3; emphasis added). She compares the overabundance of images documenting the attack on the Twin Towers with the (relative) absence of images depicting the assault on the Palacio de la Moneda during the Chilean coup, consisting mainly of a few black-and-white photographs, disseminated over and over again:

Colour and black and white will leave a mark on our memories. But they are related. True, in New York, no one censored the images of what happened. In Chile, on the other hand, the records of horror were taken away from the collective memory for nearly two decades. However, censorship and overexposure do have something in common. Neither allows us to look on calmly. And both arouse suspicion (Insunza 2003: 3).

Unfortunately, the theoretical-practical comment on mass media that *Muro Sur — Artes Visuales* aspired to become did not continue after 2003: *Backyard* was the last issue in the series and the collective initiative behind it did not last much longer. In 2000, Fernández had already decided to leave Santiago and return to the Netherlands, although she did not completely sever her ties with Muro Sur, which had by then acquired the basic administrative structure necessary to manage a small budget. Thanks to financial support from the Prince Claus Fund, Muro Sur remained in operation for another four years in a different location in Santiago, on Mosquito Street, near the city's art museum district. The last exhibition organised by the group took place at the Shanghai Biennale in the autumn of 2004,¹⁶ and featured a selection of works by its members. In this last stage, the programming was carried out by the only three artists remaining from the original group: Nury González, Josefina Guilisasti, and Voluspa Jarpa.¹⁷

Voluspa Jarpa, *Library of Non-History* (2010-2012)

Voluspa Jarpa was not only one of the members of the Muro Sur group, but also one of the few artists who continued with the initiative until the end. She had, in fact, actively participated in the call that led to the collective's participation in the Americas Society programme in 2003.

Jarpa was born in Rancagua, south of Santiago, in 1971, but because of her father's work-related travels she spent her childhood and early youth outside Chile: in Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil. In 1989, Jarpa decided to study at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Chile. Once in Santiago, she immediately noticed the

¹⁶ 'Muro Sur Chilean Contemporary Art'. Exhibition organised in the framework of the Shanghai Biennale, September–November 2004, curated by Sebastián López.

¹⁷ Muro Sur. 2020. 'About Muro Sur.' <https://www.murosul.nl/>.

stark contrast between her own personal and intellectual background and the closed and oppressive atmosphere of a country that was just beginning to emerge from a dictatorship. In her own words: 'With regard to Chile's cultural development, I wonder how one could demand a diverse, proactive or dialogical cultural context in a country that has restrictive material and intellectual characteristics. This determines institutions, artists, ways of thinking, the capacity for dialogue, academic control systems...' (Jarpa quoted in Pérez Rubio 2018: 32). The dictatorial regime, she recognised, was no longer in power, but the country was far from fully recovered from the trauma.

After university, Jarpa began her artistic career as a painter. However, the complex political processes affecting her country prompted her to gradually move away from the conventional themes addressed by painting and to begin to develop a practice focused instead on archives, memory, and collective trauma. The declassification of part of the CIA files relating to the involvement of the United States in the recent history of Chile accelerated the change of direction in Jarpa's practice.

Between 1998 and 2000, responding to international pressure sparked by the arrest of Pinochet in London, the US government authorised the first declassification of its intelligence archives on Chile from the 1960s and 1970s. The declassification was not complete; a significant number of documents were partially (sometimes even totally) redacted, showing thick lines or entire blocks of black ink that prevented part of their content from being read. Even so, the documentary material that suddenly became accessible online confirmed beyond any doubt the significant involvement of the US in the overthrow of Allende's government.

The documents had a profound impact on Jarpa, introducing her to 'an aspect of [Chilean] reality that [people of my generation] had not dealt with' (Jarpa 2024: 422). The extent of the numerous blackouts with which many parts of those documents had been censored strongly defined their visual appearance, rendering them largely illegible. The omnipresence of black redaction bars forced the artist to contemplate those files 'first as images and then as texts', because:

Text says, names, signifies and is read. Images show, represent and are looked at. A crossed-out document is a fissure, it generates chaos in thought and experience, somehow presenting violence as the reflection of hysterical bodies that somatise their repressed narrative (Jarpa 2024: 425).

In 2002, when Jarpa decided to create her first artworks based on declassified documents, she was still approaching them through painting. Those works consisted of paintings depicting some of the documents, which the artist rendered in almost-facsimile form. With those paintings, she would later comment, she was trying to answer



Fig. 5 Voluspa Jarpa, *Desclasificados*, 2005.
Courtesy of the artist.

a question: ‘Could there be such a thing as documentary painting as opposed to representational painting?’ (Jarpa quoted in Pérez Rubio 2018: 25). Or, in other words: ‘How can the declassification of archives be made visible and, therefore, represented — symbolised?’ (Jarpa 2024: 421–422). In 2003, Jarpa’s contribution to *Backyard* — which was not attributed in the publication — consisted of reproducing some declassified documents so literally as possible, transcribing part of their contents, and adding two quotes taken from bibliographic sources that delved into the issue of US interference in Chilean contemporary politics.

These early graphic works, based on archival documents, were followed by *Desclasificados* [Declassified] (2005), a series of oil-painted facsimiles in which Jarpa reproduced the front pages of several Chilean newspapers that, on 11 September 2002, reported on the first anniversary of the attack on the Twin Towers [Fig. 5]. In Jarpa’s painted front pages, however, texts or images that did not refer to the terrorist attack in New York were blacked out with thick black lines similar to those covering part of the US declassified documents. By reproducing partially censored front pages of newspapers, the artist seemed to visually express the erasure of information that the terrorist attack in New York in 2001 meant for the

tragic anniversary of the overthrow of Allende's government in Chile, which had taken place exactly 28 years earlier.¹⁸ The process of 'erasure' of memory through superimposition of new images, and the degree to which it can be accelerated by the replacement of certain images with others — both pointed at by Insunza in her contribution to the *Backyard* issue of *Muro Sur — Artes Visuales* — were particularly well exemplified in these newspaper covers painted by Jarpa.

Soon, however, the artist found that painting was insufficient to continue processing declassified archives about Chilean political history. Gradually, as she connected her reflections with her studies of psychoanalysis, collective trauma, and the trope of the hysterical woman,¹⁹ she became aware that if her first reaction to the declassified documents had been on a personal level, the trauma to which they referred, in fact, transcended far beyond the individual:

The question 'What am I going to do with this?' shifted to 'What are you going to do with this?' I understood that the answer was going to be *collective*, that it was not something I had to answer. Ethically, the archives were not an issue related to a given authorship, but rather a collective issue, and I suppose [I] had acquired a notion of the historical collective through the hysterical women (Jarpa quoted in Pérez Rubio 2018: 29; emphasis added).

Such thoughts were at the origin of *Biblioteca de la No-Historia* [Library of Non-History] (2010–2011), an installation Jarpa first presented in the context of 'Dislocation,' a project curated by artist Ingrid Wildi in 2010 in Santiago de Chile, and by Wildi and Kathleen Bühler at the Kunstmuseum Bern in 2011. The first presentation of *Biblioteca de la No-Historia* consisted of 608 books in five different formats, whose pages contained facsimiles of a selection of declassified CIA archives [Fig. 6]. Some of those books were displayed on the backlit shelves of a bookstore and could be taken away by anyone who so wished, as long as they would reply to a question printed out on a small card next to the books. The question asked what people were planning to do with the copy from *Biblioteca de la No-Historia* that they were about to take away with them, under their arm or in their bag.

In 2012, Jarpa presented a development of this project entitled *¡La historia es mía!* [History is mine!]. In this case, visitors or readers could take away two different types of volumes: some of them, as in previous presentations, contained selections from US declassified documents, while others — the new ones — contained a selection of responses written on the small cards by the visitors during the two previous public presentations of the project (Pérez Rubio 2018: 32).

Jarpa has emphasised that distributing six hundred books for free to as many individuals entailed, for her, the gesture of attempting to socialise both the

¹⁸ Voluspa Jarpa in conversation with the author, August 2025. I am deeply indebted to the artist for her generosity in sharing with me time, conversation and information about her work during the preparation of this text.

¹⁹ Psychoanalysis uses the trope of the hysterical woman to describe female patients with physical, non-organic symptoms (e.g., paralysis or tremors) that originate from repressed psychological conflicts. The denial of these conflicts channels their expression through these women's bodies. The trope has evolved from early theories of hysteria — related to the idea of the 'wandering uterus' — through Freud's interpretation, which emphasised the frequent sexual nature of repressed conflicts, to the feminist readings that relate them to patriarchal oppression.

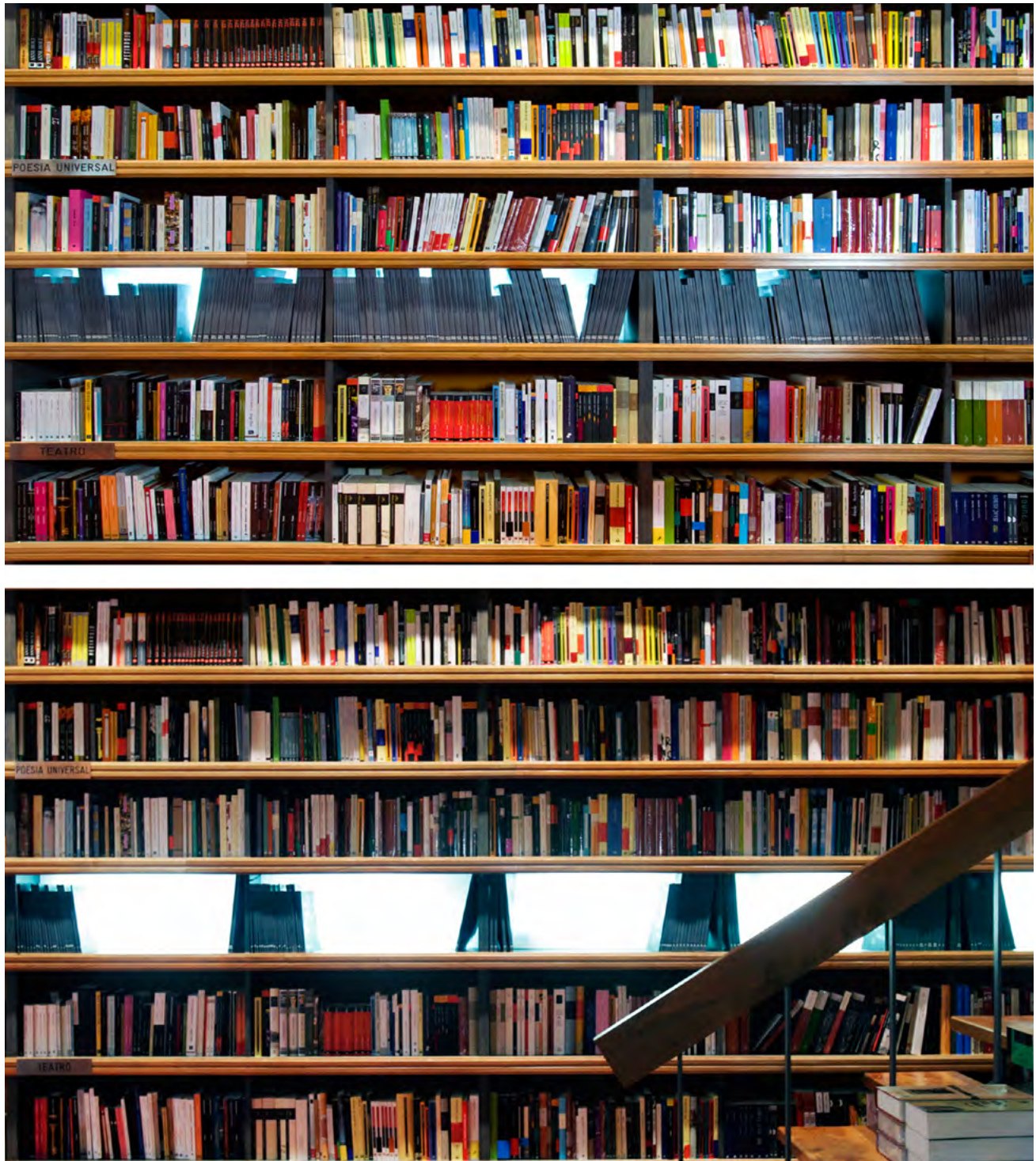


Fig. 6 Voluspa Jarpa, *Biblioteca de la No-Historia*, 2011, Santiago de Chile. Installation view in the context of the exhibition 'Dislocación', curated by Ingrid Wildie Merino. Courtesy of the artist.

historical trauma and the dilemma involved in dealing with the archival material that attests to it. This gesture, for the artist, served several purposes: it was ‘a way of processing this traumatic material, [and also] a strategy for raising awareness and dissemination’ (Jarpa quoted in Pérez Rubio 2018: 30). For her, moreover, such a gesture of socialisation was imperative because ‘more than ten years had passed since the first declassified documents appeared, and they were not being processed and transformed into books’ (Jarpa quoted in Pérez Rubio 2018: 30). In these words, it is remarkable how Jarpa uses ‘books’ as a metaphor for the collective historical, political and social handling of historical events and the trauma they had caused. ‘Books’ stand here, in short, for intellectual discourse.

Conclusion

Verisimilitude is perceived in artifices that are presented as possible. In visuality, [it is] that which is imaginatively a possibility of constituting reality.

Voluspa Jarpa (1999)

The publications edited by the Jemmy Button Inc. collective, the issues of *Muro Sur — Artes Visuales*, and the volumes that make up Voluspa Jarpa’s *Biblioteca de la No-Historia* seem, at first glance, to have little in common, except for the fact that they are the result of initiatives by visual artists and appeared in the same place — Chile — in the same period. However, if, instead of focusing on their contextual characteristics, we look at the symbolic functions that these publications sought to fulfil, each in its own way, then points of connection between them emerge that may not be so explicit at first glance.

Deficit Club and *Taxonomías* are, formally, fairly conventional books, not unlike an exhibition catalogue or a collection of essays. This should come as no surprise, since that is precisely what they are. As for *Muro Sur — Artes Visuales*, its appearance coincides with that of an informative magazine about the Chilean art scene. In fact, not only does it look like one, but that is exactly what it is. However, both publications present a certain resistance to standard categorisation. Their identity is complex because their function as conventional containers of information is not their only *raison d’être*. In addition to disseminating information, they were issued with a second mission: to become platforms on which a group of visual artists collectively assumed responsibilities in the production of discourse — editing, analysis, writing — which usually fell to other professionals in the art world. For the members of Jemmy Button Inc. and the Muro Sur collective, it was not only important

to have a print channel through which to make public their ideas about art, but even more so, to pursue the very act of publishing, of appropriating devices for the circulation of printed information that symbolically supported the legitimacy of their respective collective projects.

In the period immediately following the Pinochet dictatorship, democratic, stable art institutions open to new trends had yet to be consolidated; the cultural fabric had not been rebuilt, and the damage to the functioning of the art scene and community caused by political repression and the long period of martial law could not be left behind so quickly. Thus, by launching themselves into publishing essays and magazines that could contextualise and explain their work, artists were in fact taking on the task of generating spaces for discursive ratification of their own practice — a practice that was still developing outside official cultural institutions and often precisely as a reaction against them.

The status of these books and of this magazine as artist's publications should not, therefore, be sought in the nature of their material or aesthetic characteristics, but beyond them: on a symbolic level for which such characteristics are quite irrelevant. One of the most significant features shared by these publications lies in their potential to bring into play metaphorical implications derived from their identity as cultural artifacts that we commonly refer to as 'books' or 'magazines.' They were the printed side of artistic initiatives that involved more than mere publishing.

A similar modification, more symbolic than formal in nature, also takes place in the volumes that made up Voluspa Jarpa's *Biblioteca de la No-Historia*. These volumes were invariably different from one another, and yet those differences were irrelevant. (It is significant, in this regard, that in the photographs usually published to illustrate the *Biblioteca de la No-Historia* in exhibition spaces, the books frequently appear closed.) This is because their main purpose was not necessarily to act as carriers of content; they were not even useful as summaries or compendiums, since they were incomplete: they contained only a certain amount of the documents available online in much greater quantity. Art historian and curator Tobias Peper has pointed out that these books frustrate expectations as providers of information, aptly describing them as 'the physical representation of an apparent truth, whose impossible articulation simultaneously unmasks them as historical and political lies' (Peper 2015: 132). Jarpa herself has expressed the same idea in another way, emphasising the non-discursive and non-analytical nature of the content of these volumes, made up of documents that had not yet been properly assimilated, either intellectually or emotionally: '[The *Biblioteca de la No-Historia*] may look like a series of books, but it remains a document dealing with events that have not yet been given social and symbolic meaning' (Pérez Rubio 2018: 30). The books in the *Biblioteca de la No-Historia* lack individual

identity; they function only as a gesture, or as the materialisation of an idea that is neither connected to nor dependent on their material configuration.

I would like to suggest that these publications by artists, which appeared during a complex historical period in which Pinochet's dictatorial structures had not yet completely disappeared and had not been replaced by others, attest to the existence of a particular mode of publication which does not entirely conform to what is usually understood by artist's publications, nor can it be considered strictly an experimental practice, since it adheres to existing editorial standards in editorial standards in art. It therefore requires a different type of analysis: one that pays attention to the symbolic meanings and resonances of the publications it focuses on, as well as to the connections they establish with their respective contexts, rather than analysing the features of their materiality. A model, in short, that goes beyond the concept of the artist's book, whose definition undoubtedly needs to be urgently revised, reformulated, and expanded.

Acknowledgements

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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

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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),¹ 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

¹ 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-editions² 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.³ 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,⁴ whether through the publication of individual and collective works, or via periodicals, particularly in the case of Padín.⁵ 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.

² 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.

³ 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.

⁴ 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).

⁵ 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.⁶ 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).⁷ 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.⁸ 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.

⁶ ‘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.

⁷ See also Ferranto 1999 and Nogueira 2011.

⁸ 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.'⁹

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".¹⁰ 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,¹¹ and the neo-imperialist agenda of the United States towards its southern neighbours.¹²

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

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

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

¹¹ '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).

¹² 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].

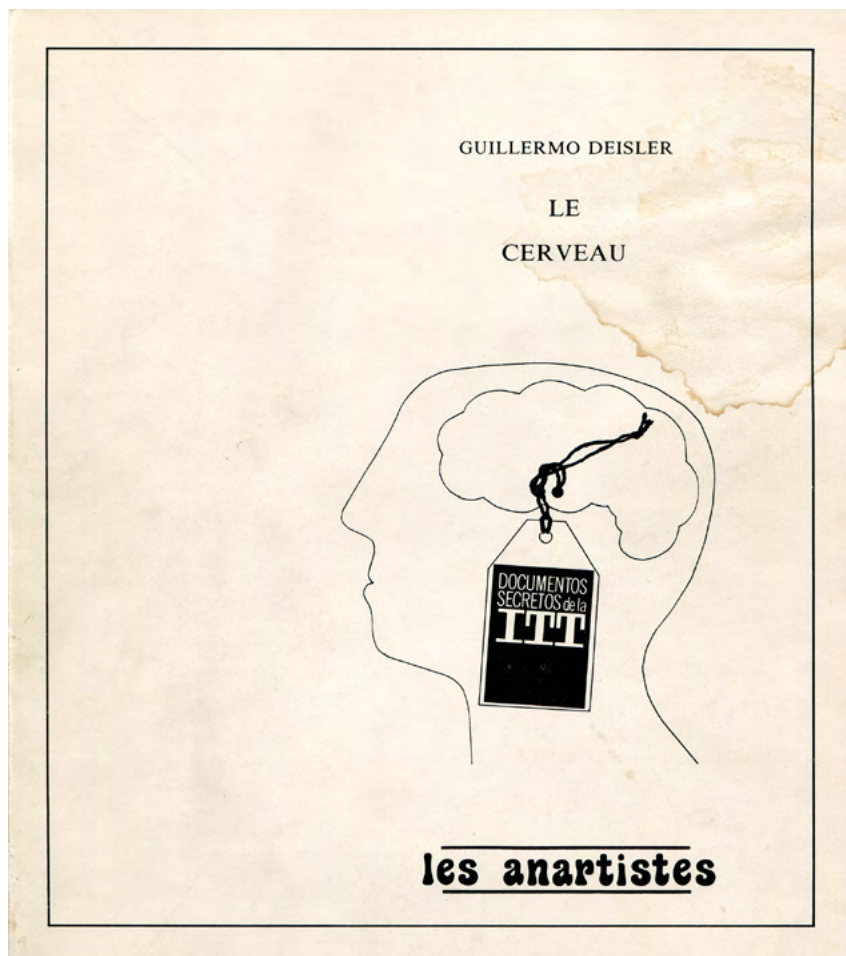


Fig. 3 Guillermo Deisler, *Le Cerveau*. *Documentos Secretos de la ITT. Les Anartistes*, 1975, Nouvelles Éditions Polaires. Book cover. Fondo Guillermo Deisler, Centro de Documentación de las Artes Visuales (CEDOC), CNAC.

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 time¹³ — 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

¹³ 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.).¹⁴

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).¹⁵

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,¹⁶ 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,

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ 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.’

¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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.).¹⁸ 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].¹⁹

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,

¹⁷ 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*).

¹⁸ Capitalised in the original.

¹⁹ 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*.

²⁰ 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.

²¹ 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.

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

²³ 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.²⁰ 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.²¹ 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.²² 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.²³ 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

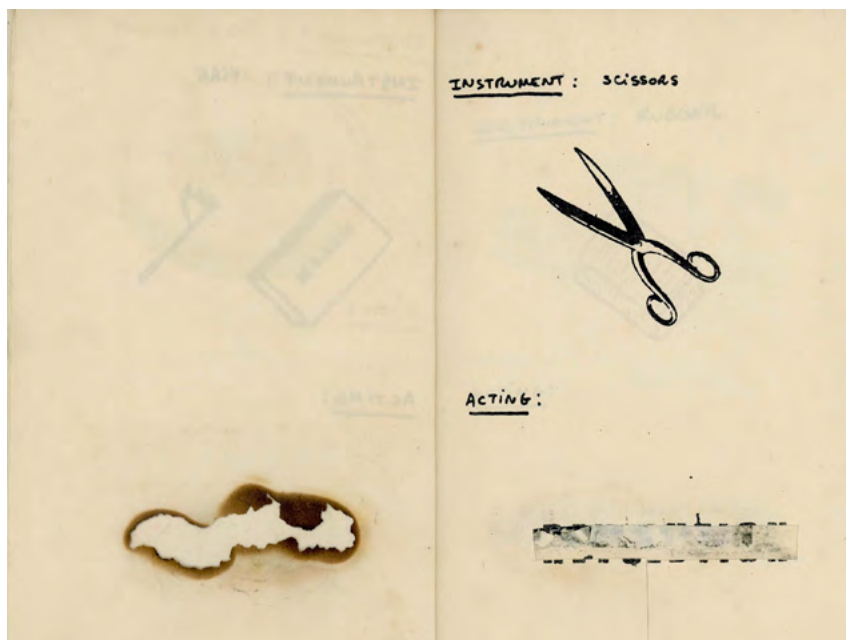
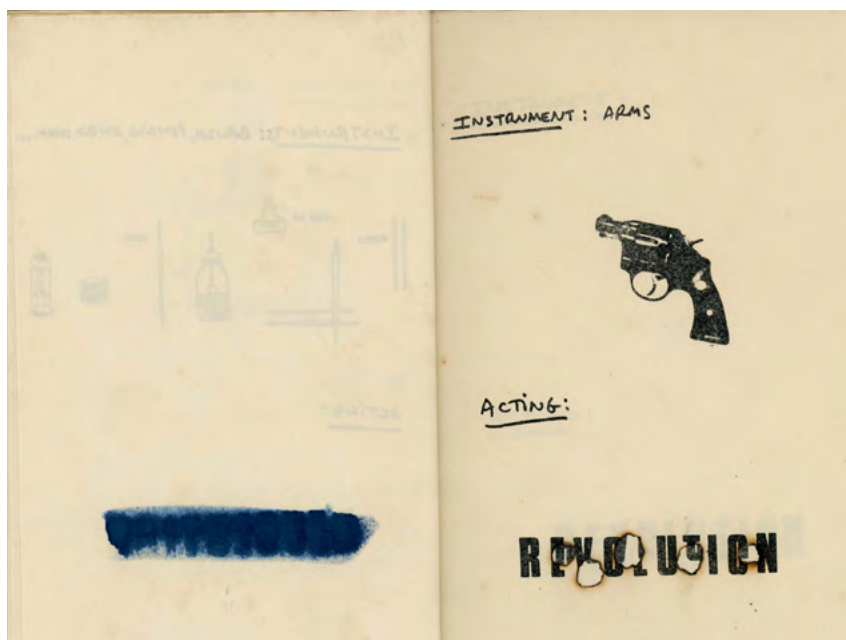


Fig. 6a, 6b Clemente Padín, *Instrumentos/74. Mechanics Instruments for the Control of the Information*, 1974. Ediciones Ovum. Inside pages. Archivo Privado Clemente Padín / Archivo General de la Universidad de la República.



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.²⁴ 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 censors²⁵ and co-authors of the work [Fig. 6a, 6b].

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

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ 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).

²⁷ 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.

²⁸ 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).

²⁹ 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.).²⁶

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.²⁷ 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.²⁸ 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.²⁹ 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.'³⁰ The book, well known to Mail Art enthusiasts, is preserved in numerous archives and collections and can be easily consulted.³¹ 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).

³⁰ 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>.

³¹ *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.

³² 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/>.

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

³⁴ 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.'³²

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.³³

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'³⁴ 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 postcard³⁵ 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.³⁶

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.’³⁷

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>.

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

³⁶ 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>.

³⁷ 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.³⁸ 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,³⁹ 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).⁴⁰

³⁸ 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.

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

⁴⁰ 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 2018.⁴¹ Such approaches to the exchange and circulation of works, which are currently experiencing renewed interest,⁴² 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'.⁴³ The eye pierced by a gunshot in Deisler's edition is reinterpreted following the sad record number

⁴¹ 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/>.

⁴² '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.

⁴³ 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.'⁴⁴ 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'.⁴⁵ 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.

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

⁴⁵ 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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Windows: on Post-Dictatorial Openings, Thresholds, and Opacities

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1.

Is it possible to identify the precise moment when a dictatorship ends and a post-dictatorship begins? The idea of a clear line drawn by the death of the dictator, or by institutional changes which would clearly define the before and after is certainly misleading. This is especially true when some administrations and actors remain in place, and when public recognition of the crimes committed by the previous regime is deferred indefinitely. The idea of a radical shift from one state to another is also problematic, because it contributes to invisibilising the long and tortuous processes towards change, in which citizens and grassroots movements play a central role.

Rather than looking for unambiguous symbols that claim to embody this rupture and celebrate it, can we instead recover visible signs or patterns that suggest another temporality for transformation, and show its unfolding over a longer period of time, albeit necessarily troubled and uneven? Less ostentatious and less noisy, yet persistent clues, or symptoms, like a handful of grass sprouting beneath stones.

Windows are liminal elements or structures whose crossing implies a transition or a passage from one condition, or state, to another. Their literal and metaphorical occurrence in marginal and alternative publications printed in Spain in the early years following the end of the dictatorship (from 1975 on) is not fortuitous. It raises questions about the multiple meanings and nuances attributed to them, their evocative power, and their persuasive force when it comes to express the feeling of 'opening up' of new horizons — both in a physical and symbolic sense.

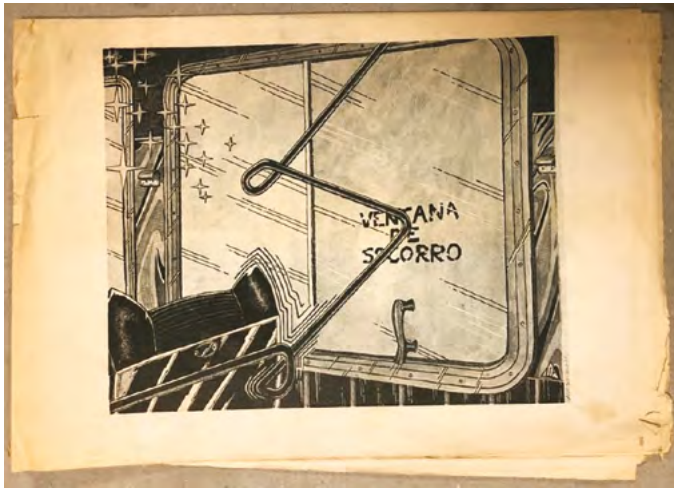
Windows of different sorts populate these pages. Tenuous openings in prison cells, from which it is hard to tell on which side we stand — inside or out. Reflective and blind surfaces in large urban settlements that highlight the dehumanisation of these new suburbs where the working class, often after rural exodus, is confined and subjected to asphyxiating spaces and times of production. Thresholds which, if crossed, make social interaction possible but also, sometimes, accentuate the solitude of individual subjects. Gates to highly uncertain yet beautiful new spaces and landscapes, that bring in fresh air and light as a metaphor for change.

As openings, windows take on new meanings when the conceptions and uses of exterior and interior are altered and transformed. They reflect changes in someone's exposure to different gazes and forms of authority, and in their progressive liberation from decades of occultation. They manifest diverse visual options, which the possibility of going out freely onto the street redefines and connects with the (re)appearance of a collective body that had never ceased to exist.

2.



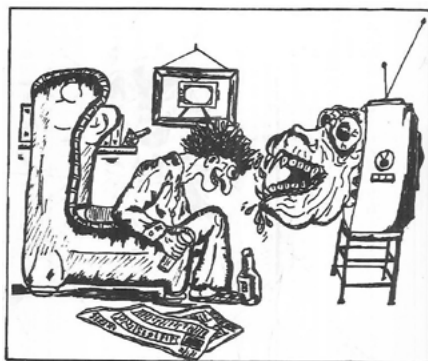
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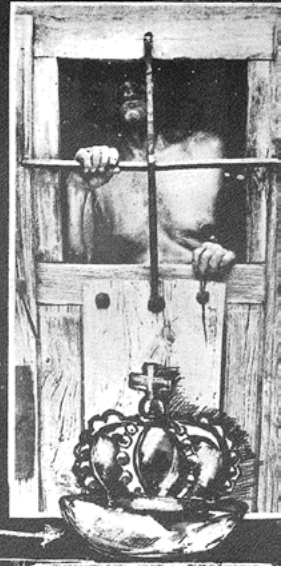
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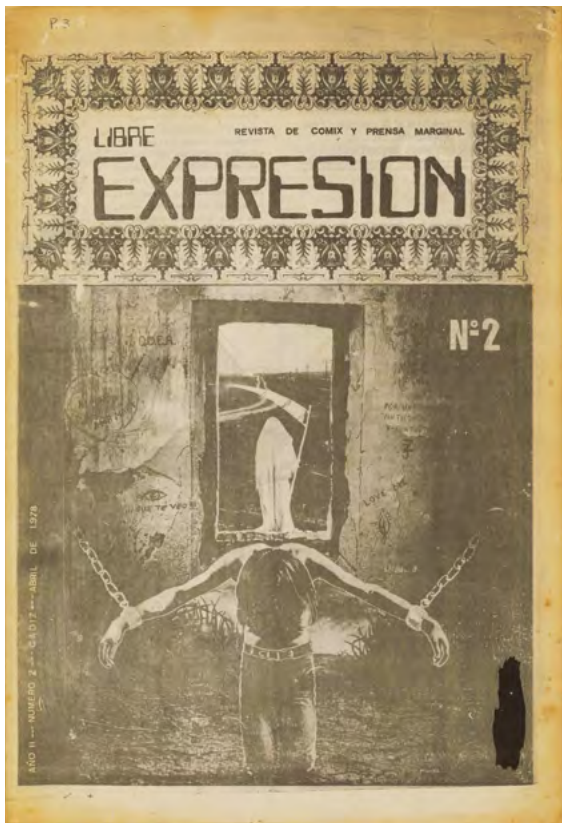
1975 Coronacion de un REY
..... el PUEBLO pide:

'AMNISTIA!!!
S.M. y Gobierno
conceden:

INDULTO
y
salen algunos.....



6.



7.

I look through our images, photos, scans of physical pages recovered from archives, and think about windows. The truth is that I don't think about any specific representation, but rather the idea of a window. Why are there so many on these pages? What is a window? Is it an opening in an enclosed space? The condition of possibility of light and air? Of the private and the public?

Is a page a window?

8.



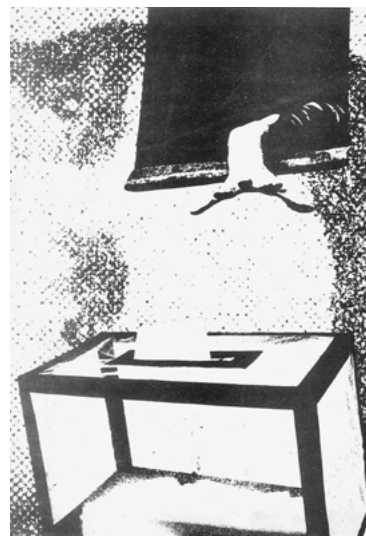
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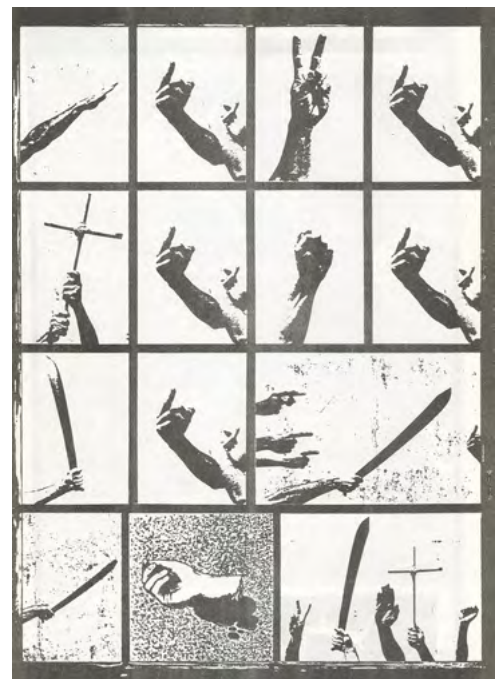
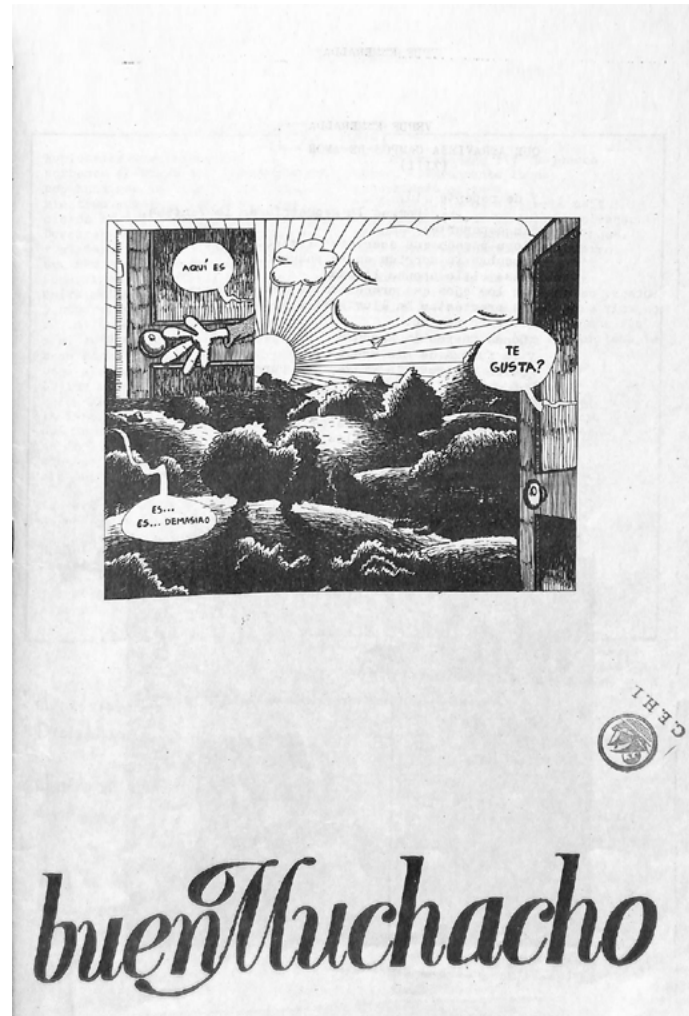


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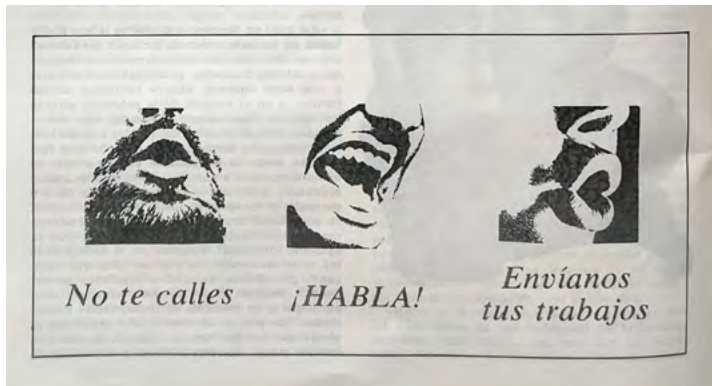
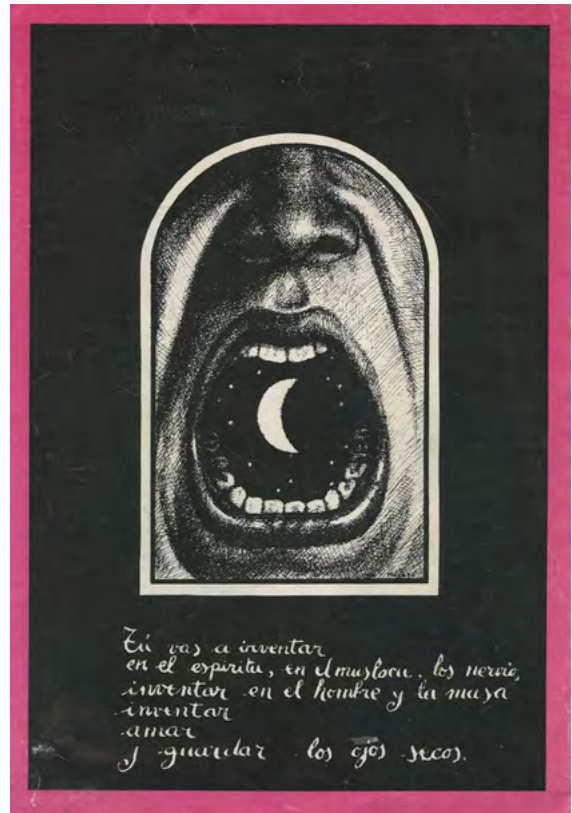


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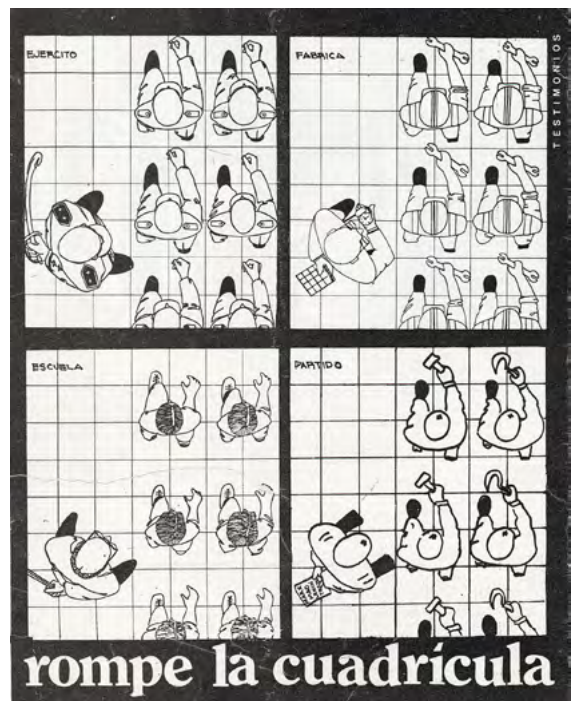


15.



16.

The marginal press that emerged after the Franco regime seems to act as a window for unfiltered and uncensored expressions. In some way, these pages were spaces to articulate frustrations, but also desires and imagined futures. The barred face cries out 'Enough!' in *Ateneo* [Athenaeum], a publication edited in Madrid's Usera neighbourhood — They didn't want their mouths, their eyes, to be prisons anymore. They wanted to remove the bars from the windows.



17.

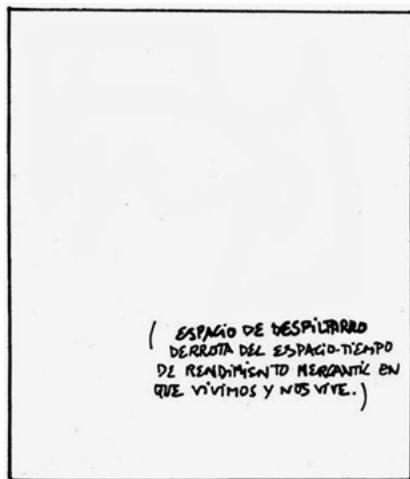
18.



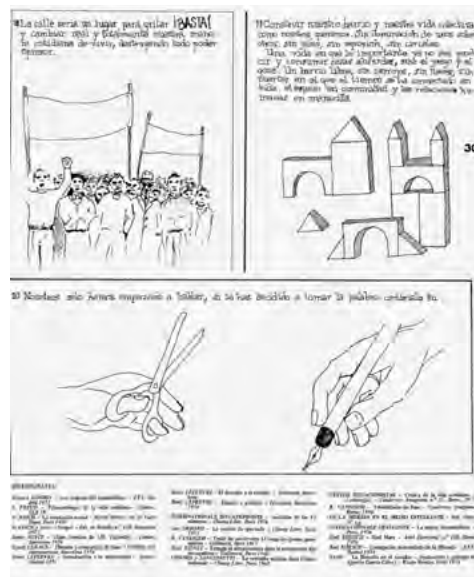
19.



These publications are also interfaces, windows between fiction and reality. I am looking now at the cover of *Buen muchacho* [Good Lad], and see a hand opening a window, revealing a sunny, fragrant, dreamy landscape. Was this the moment when the dream finally came true? Could our dreams — an idyllic enclave, far removed from the grey asphalt city — finally happen?



20.



21.



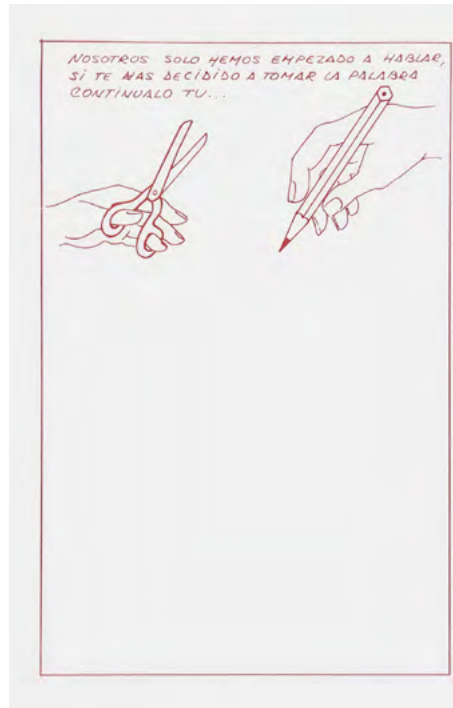
22.

UN amanecer NO SE improvisa al PIAJO,
 NI SE CAHUELA BAGO EL LECHO DIMINUTO de los recién nacidos,
 SE CONQUISTA CON LOS OJOS desesperadamente abiertos.
 en carne viva desde la madrugada,
 sin CAPE, sin caricias ni alfileres.
 UN AMANECEER NO ES UN MILAGRO,
 ES EL DOLOR DE MILES DE SERES que aún esperan
 con OJOS Rabiosamente abiertos
 la mañana.

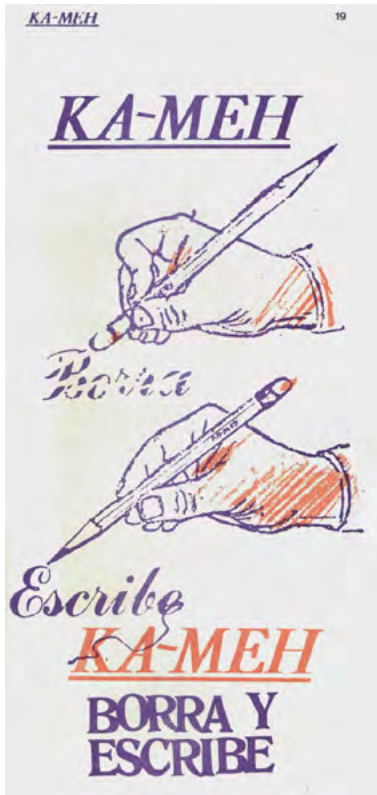
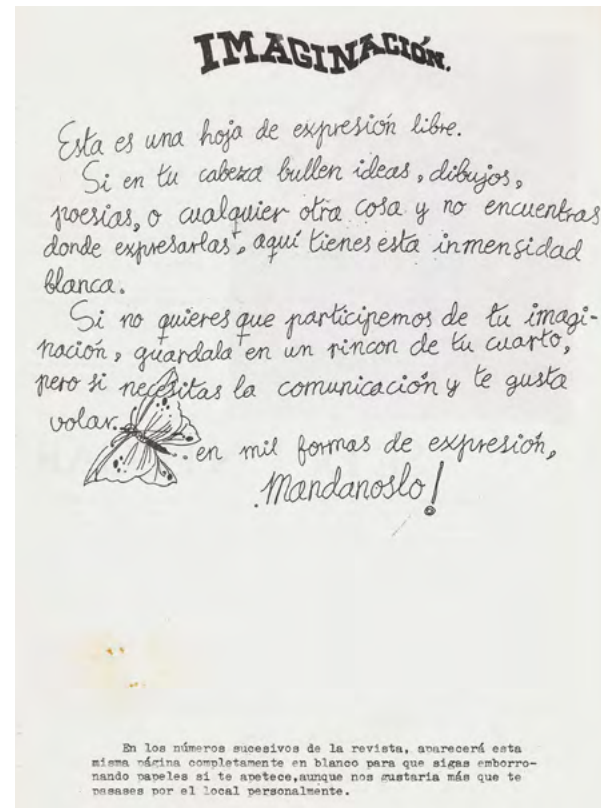
23.



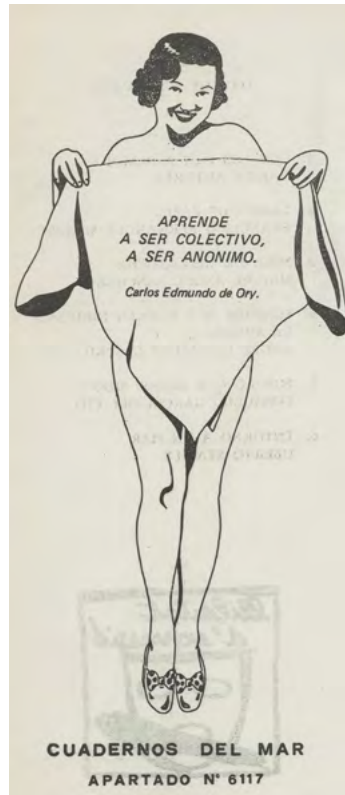
24.



25.



26.



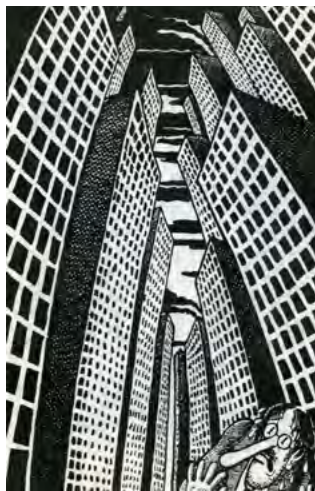
27.

Statement: post-dictatorships provoke multiple openings and beginnings. In *Uronia*, they say: 'A sunrise is not a miracle; it is the pain of thousands of beings who still wait for the morning with eyes wide open'. A sunrise is a beginning between many others. Another beginning can be spied behind the rickety door in the bulletin of the Libertarian Athenaeum of 'Kantabria' (Cantabria), and I think of the aftermath of a war, or a famine.

Has the time come for the suffering to end? History is never linear, and yet it throws up exceptions, rifts, fictions that say: yes, at last.

On the pages we find a hand opening a window to witness a sunrise. Hands on. They are constantly intertwined with hands that draw, write, and cut with scissors. They are shaping a reality to come — through the pages? Through publishing?

We could also think about the meeting of hands on these printed surfaces as a metaphor, but also a reality. They speak of loneliness, sadness, and anguish (on the cover of the periodical *Mmm...!!* you can read 'Nos sentimos verdaderamente solos... Sniff' [We feel truly alone... Sniff]). They speak of the desire to find each other — through these communication projects, papers. Another prison with bars could be the urban grid that traps bodies, words, and desires. The city enhances solitude. And now I look at the vignette in *Baladas urbanas* [Urban Ballads], or the cover of *Talego* [Long Sack]. And especially at the page in *Catarsis* [Catharsis], where you can see a shapeless smoker with flowers and wild plants sprouting from his jacket. And here comes the herb hypothesis — *Mala hierba* [Bad Weed] is the name of another marginal periodical, but it can also be a way of thinking about these rebellious publications that grow between the cracks in the sidewalks and flower beds.



30.

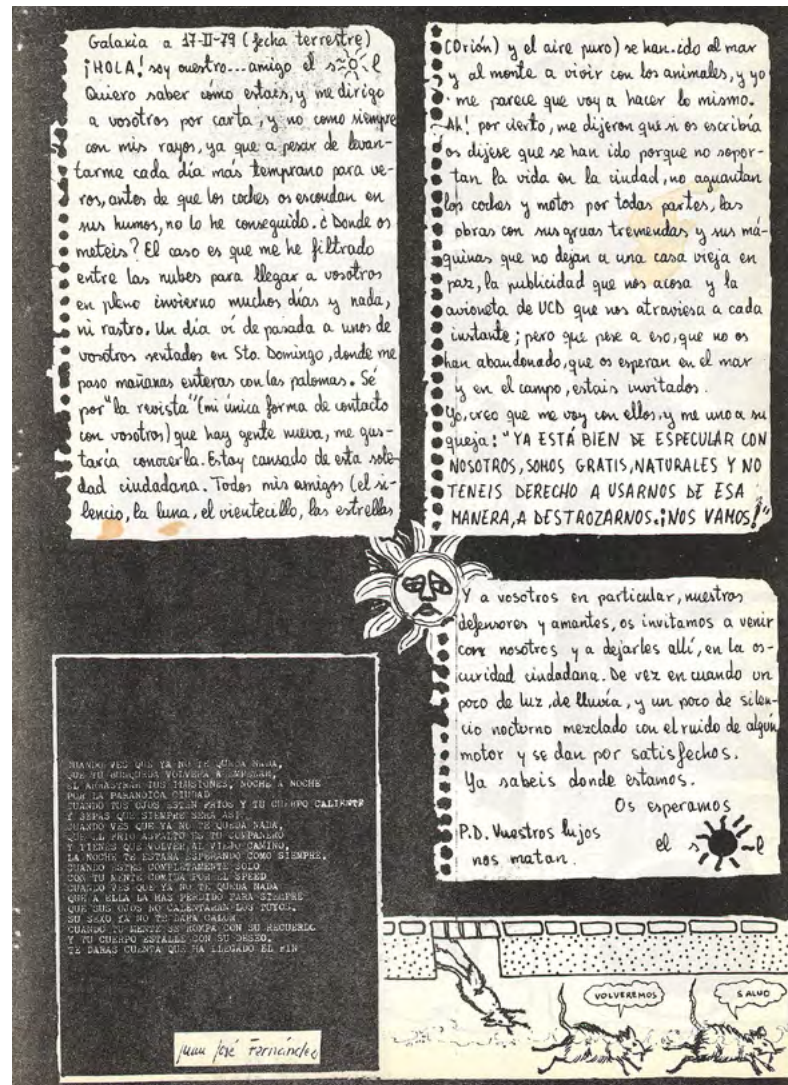


31.

28.



29.



32.

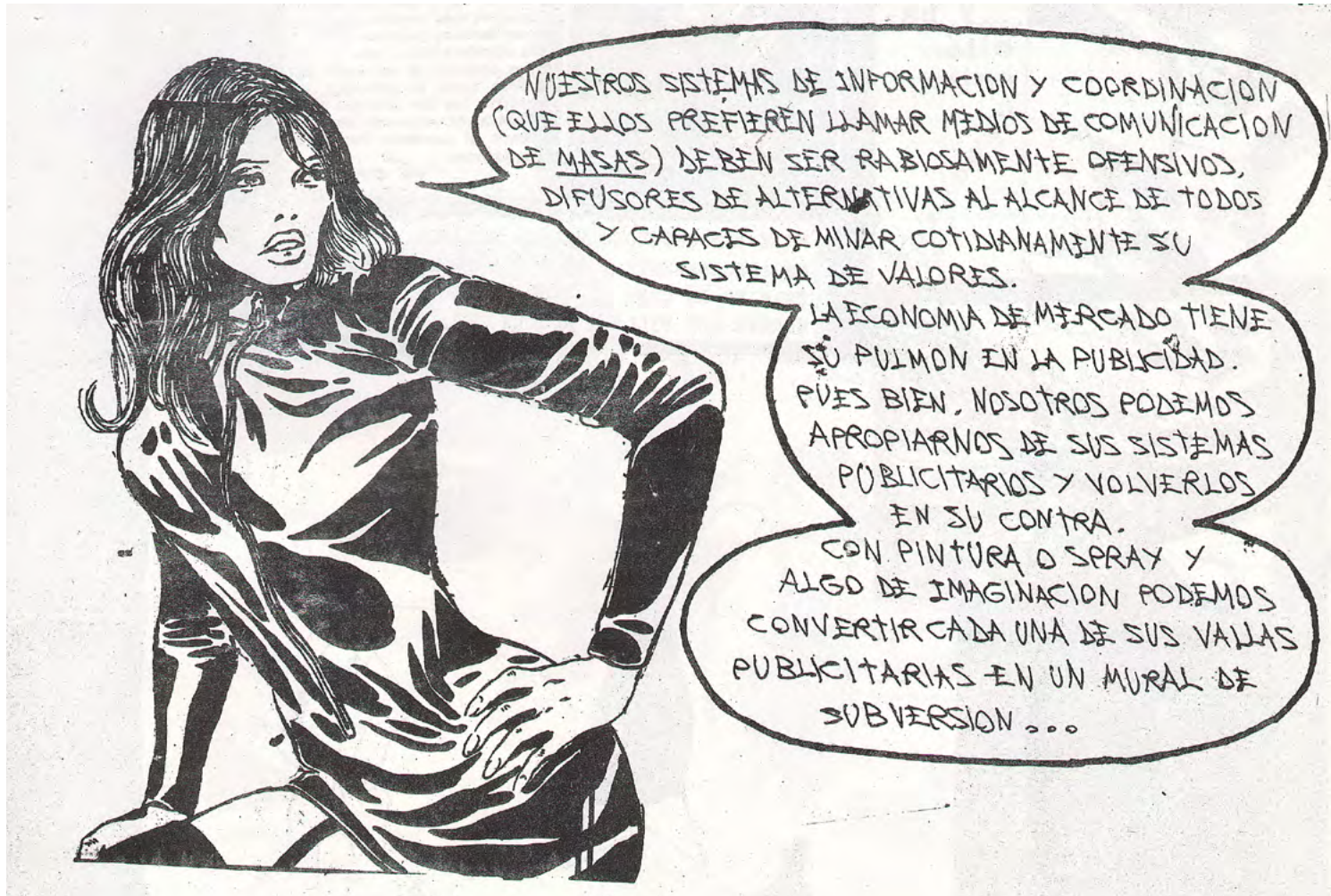


33.



34.

35.



The marginal press is a place counterposed to architecture. In *Ajoblanco* they talk about 'the beautiful frigidity of progressive architecture and the modern city'. The city is a programmed, aseptic, and austere grid that suffocates. And I wonder — what would a vital, vitalistic architecture be like? Stubble, wild pages. Wild gardens without fences.



In *Nuestro barrio* [Our Neighbourhood], the editors — neighbours from Baix Llobregat, in the province of Barcelona — say that our whole life could be different. That they want to free up time for bliss, conversation, and the enjoyment of life and things. *Nuestro barrio* is a window that allows us to see this possibility, but it is also a magazine.

Elsewhere, and I agree, they say that when we are truly free, politics will be nothing more than a song. They started to sing this song by editing, pulling back the bars, the curtains, the grids. Letting the sound of this dream in.

Hace tiempo que pienso que no hay tiempo, que dejó de existir sin avisarnos, o tal vez se marchó por ningún camino, mientras que los hombres se desesperaban en las prisas y continuaban poniendo en hora sus relojes, y continúan comprando cronómetros perfectos.

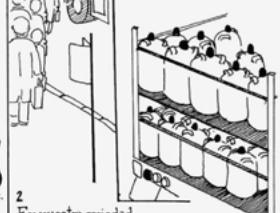


¡NUESTRO BARRIO ES INTOLERABLE!

1 Nuestro barrio es intolerable, desde el barrio, el piso, la compra, la escuela... todo es intolerable. Nuestra vida diaria es intolerable. Todo está programado, todo impuesto, incluso nuestras ideas, maneras de ver las cosas, lo que tenemos que hacer, todo nos es impuesto. Si logramos abrir los ojos, quitarnos la venda, pensar por nuestra cuenta, y tomar ya la palabra... descubrirnos, nos y llamaremos por su nombre lo que es intolerable. Y empezaremos a cambiar, a transformar nuestro barrio, nuestras ideas, y nuestra manera diaria de vivir.



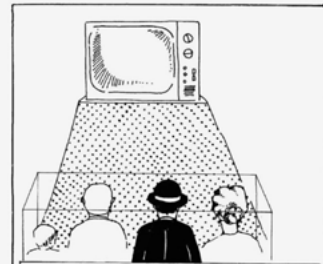
El barrio está pensado para... 3 dormir, descansar, comer, reproducirse... todo lo necesario para estar dispuesto a *SEMIRITAZAR* y *MORIR EN LA FÁBRICA*. Se nos enseña, de todas las maneras, a ser fáciles, obedientes, no rebeldes, *DESIN*, porque así nos necesitan para poder ser manejados con facilidad a la vuelta de los trabajos.



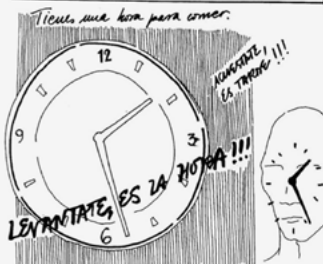
2 En nuestra sociedad capitalista los obreros somos comprados por un salario, un sueldo. Como todas las mercancías, la fuerza para trabajar, los obreros, tenemos un precio. Cuando las mercancías no se usan, se guardan en un almacén. La ciudad también muchas veces. *EL ALMACÉN DE OBREROS ES EL PÁRAMO*. En el barrio se guarda la fuerza de trabajo durante el tiempo de no trabajo.



4 La TV, que ha invadido nuestros pisos, nos aleja de lo digno y pobre de nuestra vida. Nos enseña a ser especuladores pútridos de las grandes desgracias de los hombres.

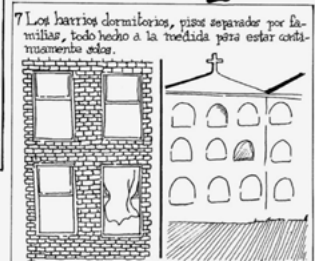


5 Nos presenta lo que pasa en todo el mundo, pero como un espectador, como si tu nada puedes hacer para transformarlo. La TV nos embolsa en casa para que no nos enteremos de lo que realmente NOS PASA FUERA, EN LA CALLE.



9 Toda nuestra vida está programada, cronometrada, sin posibilidad alguna de escapar para vivir, para *agotar*, para imaginar, para hacer lo que te da la gana. Nuestra vida privada no es nuestra, sino de los que te hacen vivir la privada para que a ellos les aproveche.

6 El *COM* nos separa a unos de otros. Nos quita la posibilidad de *ENCANTARNOS*, saludarnos, como perros... en nuestro viaje de la vivienda a la fábrica. Somos unos extranjeros para los demás. Casi enemigos.



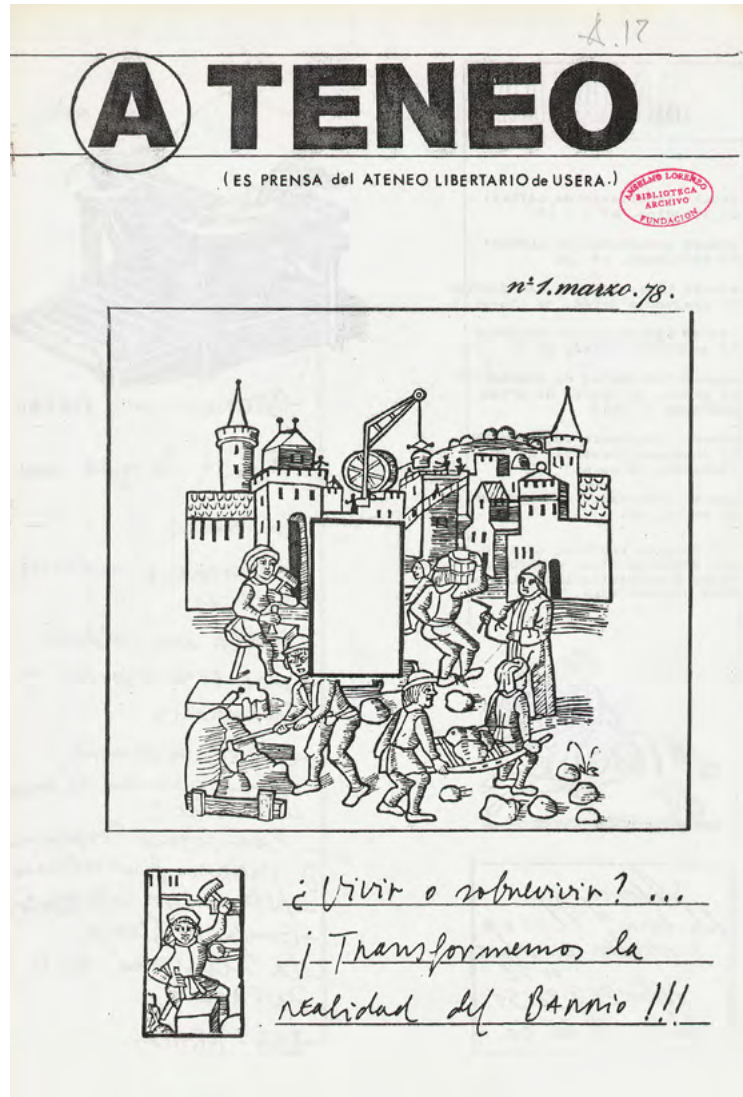
7 Los barrios dormitorio, piso separado por familias, todo hecho a la medida para estar continuamente solos.

8 Cada uno su cocina PRIVADA, su comedor PRIVADO, su lavadero privado. Todo para evitar toda posibilidad de *VIR* COMUNITARIA, de amistad.

¡¡¡¡¡¡¡¡¡¡¡
TRABAJA MÁS RÁPIDO E NO HAYAS LA PREOCUPACIÓN.

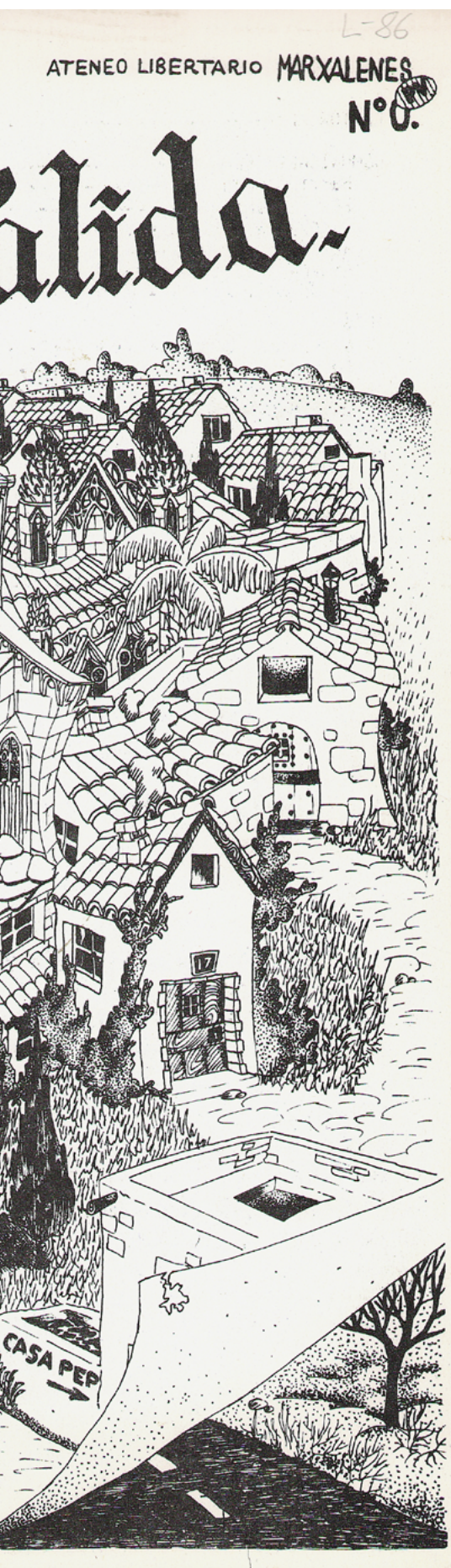
Vete a casa!

39.



Statement: between fiction and reality there is a window that is a communicating passage, a threshold, and this window is built in these pages.





L-86
 ATENEO LIBERTARIO MARXALENES

N.º 0.

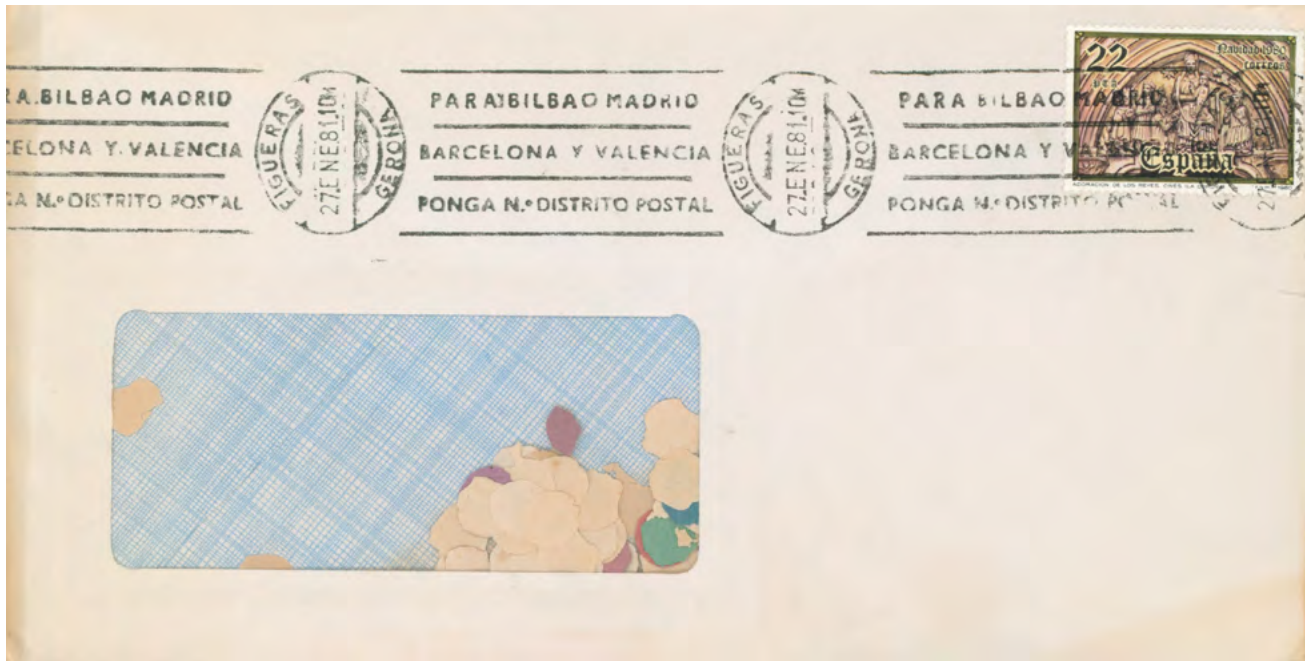
Salida.

Post-dictatorships are exceptional moments in terms of visibility. In many ways, the periods that follow the end of a dictatorship are presented as openness, clarity, and purity — a blank canvas for a new beginning. Yet history shows that the end of an authoritarian regime does not grant all social sectors the same degree of freedom, recognition, or representation, nor does it remain faithful to that visibility when it comes to the elements of the dictatorial past that are best kept in darkness.

It is therefore worth asking: what time and space of visibility does the post-dictatorial scopic regime allow and for whom? Or, put differently, what can and cannot be seen, or be made visible after the death of a dictator? How, and when, does one allow oneself to be seen in the streets — what clothes to wear, what words to choose, what magazines to read, what banners to carry? But also, what role does darkness play in a time of apparent (media) visibility, (political) openness, and (democratic) clarity? How are the desired darkness and secrecy to be safeguarded against the false political and securitarian transparency of those early moments of hope — but also of fear and distrust — that a change of regime brings about?

There is a great deal of darkness in the marginal press publications of post-Franco Spain — a darkness that coexists with flashes of light slipping through the gaps of windows, doors, grilles, and holes of various kinds. The relationship with a new visibility is clear; the very first definition of ‘window’ contains within it the words ‘wall’, ‘look’, and ‘light’: the window as a barrier to break (the wall), a means to permit an action once forbidden (to look), and the element through which to carry it out (the light). Yet, as noted, in these images the windows contain as much light as darkness and opacity. And somewhere within the images — or rather, in the encompassing gaze that brings them together — the material and social realities, not always clear or unambiguous, of post-dictatorial ‘democratic openness’ in Spain are quietly suggested.

The exercise of placing them together reveals how the drawings, inscriptions, texts, collages, and photographs that fill these pages trace an escape from the uniformity, transparency, and homogeneity with which Spain’s post-dictatorship has been narrated, while simultaneously revealing some of the complexities that defined the process. Within them we find silence, confusion, fear, but also hope, and a horizon of expectations imagined by hand, with pencil on paper. The people involved in these alternative and marginal periodicals turned the wall into a window, the window into a page, and the page into a new public sphere in which to meet.



41.

- Fig. 1** Cover and back cover of *El Coco*, n. 1 (Madrid, April 1977). Demetrio Enrique Brisset's personal archives.
- Fig. 2** Inside page of *Ateneo Libertario de Kantabria* [Libertarian Atheneum of Kantabria], n. 1 (Santander, August 1977). Inés Molina's personal archives.
- Fig. 3** Inside page of *El Rollo Higiénico* [The Toilet Roll], n. 1 (Sevilla, 1978). Tebeosfera.
- Fig. 4** Antonio Madrigal, untitled. Catalogue of the Mail Art exhibition 'Negro sobre blanco', La Casa del Siglo XV, Segovia. Organised by Atelier Bonanova and directed by José Luis Mata. 21 October to 8 November, 1978. Courtesy Collection and Archive of Jiří Valoch, Moravian Gallery in Brno.
- Fig. 5** Inside page of *Zaranda. Revista libertaria de Andalucía* [Zaranda. Andalusian Libertarian Magazine], n. 0 (February — March 1979). Hemeroteca Municipal de Sevilla.
- Fig. 6** 'Amnistía total' [Total Amnesty], inside page of *El Coco*, n. 1 (Madrid, April 1977). Demetrio Enrique Brisset's personal archives.
- Fig. 7** Cover of *Libre Expresión* [Free Expression], n. 2, second year (Cádiz, April 1978). Biblioteca José Celestino Mutis, Cádiz.
- Fig. 8** Inside page of *Ajoblanco*, 'Especial Prensa Marginal' [Special Issue on Marginal Press] (Barcelona, October 1978). Archivo Ajoblanco-pepe ribas.
- Fig. 9** Inside page of *Ajoblanco*, 'Especial Prensa Marginal' [Special Issue on Marginal Press] (Barcelona, October 1978). Archivo Ajoblanco-pepe ribas.
- Fig. 10** Cover of *Buen muchacho* [Good Lad], n. 3 (Barcelona, April 1977). CRAI Pavelló de la República — University of Barcelona.
- Fig. 11** Inside page of *Ajoblanco*, 'O indulto o arrasamos las cárceles' [Amnesty or we'll tear down the prisons], n. 28 (Barcelona, December 1977). Archivo Ajoblanco-pepe ribas.
- Fig. 12** Cover of *El Coco*, n. 2 (Madrid, June 1977). Demetrio Enrique Brisset's personal archives.
- Fig. 13** Back cover of *Uronia*, n. 2 (Madrid, ca. 1978). Anselmo Lorenzo Foundation for Libertarian Studies.
- Fig. 14** '¡Ya vale!' [Enough is enough!], inside page of *Ateneo*, n. 3 (Libertarian Atheneum of Usera, Madrid, 1979). Anselmo Lorenzo Foundation for Libertarian Studies.
- Fig. 15** 'Tú vas a inventar...' [You are going to invent], back cover of *El pollo urbano. Revista especializada en artes* [The Urban Chicken. Magazine Specializing in the Arts], n. 3 (Zaragoza, spring 1977). Dionisio Sánchez' personal archives.

- Fig. 16** Inside page of *Kábila. Colectivo de cultura popular* [Kábila. Popular Culture Collective], n. 6 (Córdoba, February–March 1979). Biblioteca Provincial de Córdoba.
- Fig. 17** ‘Escuela, ejército, cárcel, cuadrícula’ [School, army, prison, grid], inside page of *La Barricada*, n. 0 (Libertarian Youth of Valencia, 1978). Anselmo Lorenzo Foundation for Libertarian Studies.
- Fig. 18** Back cover of *Zaranda. Revista libertaria de Andalucía* [Zaranda. Andalusian Libertarian Magazine], n. 0 (February — March 1979). Hemeroteca Municipal de Sevilla.
- Fig. 19** Cover of *Por una sexualidad libre. Órgano del Movimiento Homosexual de Acción Revolucionaria* [For a Free Sexuality. Organ of the Homosexual Movement for Revolutionary Action], n. 1 (Sevilla, June 1978). Armand de Fluvià Documentation Center.
- Fig. 20** Inside page of *Ajoblanco*, n. 12 (Barcelona, April 1976). Archivo Ajoblanco-pepe ribas.
- Fig. 21** ‘Nuestro barrio es intolerable!’ [Our neighbourhood is unbearable!], inside page of *Ajoblanco*, n. 16 (Barcelona, November 1976). Archivo Ajoblanco-pepe ribas.
- Fig. 22** ‘Un amanecer no se improvisa al piano...’ [A sunrise cannot be improvised on the piano], inside page of *Uronia*, n. 4 (Madrid, May 1976). Anselmo Lorenzo Foundation for Libertarian Studies.
- Fig. 23** Back cover of *Ateneo Libertario Zona Centro* [Libertarian Atheneum Downtown Area], n. 1 (Madrid, 1978). CRAI Pavelló de la República — University of Barcelona.
- Fig. 24** Back cover of *Nuestro barrio es intolerable* [Our Neighbourhood is Unbearable] (Baix Llobregat, 1978). Xavier Oller’s personal archives.
- Fig. 25** ‘Imaginación’ [Imagination], inside page of *Crisálida*, n. 0 (Libertarian Atheneum of Marxalenes, Valencia, 1979). Anselmo Lorenzo Foundation for Libertarian Studies.
- Fig. 26** Inside page of *Ka-meh*, n. 1-2 (Granada, August 1977). Biblioteca de Andalucía.
- Fig. 27** Front of the bookmark made by the publishing house Cuadernos del Mar (1980). Inés Molina’s personal archives, courtesy of Uberto Stabile.
- Fig. 28** ‘Nos sentimos verdaderamente solos...’ [We feel truly alone], cover of *Mmm*, n. 1 (Equipo Antípodas, Madrid, 1976). Alberto García-Alix’ personal archives.

- Fig. 29** Back cover of *Catarsis. Revista de crítica y cultura* [Catharsis. Magazine of Criticism and Culture], n. 4 (Córdoba, June 1983). Biblioteca Provincial de Córdoba.
- Fig. 30** Back cover of *Baladas urbanas* [Urban Ballads] (Pere Joan, Barcelona, 1976). La web sense nom.
- Fig. 31** Cover of *Talego* (Colectivo Talego, Bilbao, 1978), unnumbered. Inés Molina's personal archives.
- Fig. 32** 'Comunicaciones' [Communications], inside page of *Érase una vez... una revista antiautoritaria* [Once Upon a Time... An Anti-Authoritarian Magazine], n. 3 (Murcia, n.d.). CRAI Pavelló de la República — University of Barcelona.
- Fig. 33** Inside page of *Ajoblanco*, n. 16 (Barcelona, November 1976). Archivo Ajoblanco-pepe ribas.
- Fig. 34** 'Un mundo frío, seco y aparte...' [A cold, dry, and separate world], cover of *La julandrona atípica* [The atypical julandrona], unnumbered (Barcelona, 1981). CRAI Pavelló de la República — University of Barcelona.
- Fig. 35** 'Nuestros sistemas de información y coordinación...' [Our information and coordination systems...], inside page of *Érase una vez... una revista antiautoritaria* [Once Upon a Time... An Anti-Authoritarian Magazine], unnumbered (January, 1979). CRAI Pavelló de la República — University of Barcelona.
- Fig. 36** '¡Necesitamos un teléfono para comunicarnos!' [We need a phone to communicate!], back cover of *TRICOCO. Coordinación de tribus comunas y cooperativas* [TRICOCO. Coordination of Communal Tribes and Cooperatives], n. 3 (Barcelona, 1977). CRAI Pavelló de la República — University of Barcelona.
- Fig. 37** 'Hace tiempo que pienso que no hay tiempo...' [I have long believed that there is no time], inside page of *Ateneo Libertario Zona Centro*, n. 0 (Madrid, 1978). CRAI Pavelló de la República — University of Barcelona.
- Fig. 38** 'Nuestro barrio es intolerable!' [Our neighbourhood is unbearable!], inside page of *Ajoblanco*, n. 16 (Barcelona, November 1976). Archivo Ajoblanco-pepe ribas.
- Fig. 39** Cover of *Ateneo*, n. 1 (Libertarian Atheneum of Usera, Madrid, March 1978). Anselmo Lorenzo Foundation for Libertarian Studies.
- Fig. 40** Cover of *Crisálida*, n. 0 (Libertarian Atheneum of Marxalenes-Benicalap, Valencia, 1979). Anselmo Lorenzo Foundation for Libertarian Studies.
- Fig. 41** Josep Maria Joan i Rosa. Untitled mail art work. 1981. Courtesy Collection and Archive of Jiří Valoch, Moravian Gallery in Brno.

Interviews

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

On Marginal Press in Post-Franco Spain

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<https://doi.org/10.34619/sz3y-t1il>

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.¹ 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).

¹ 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.²



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.

² 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),³ 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 Maria 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?

³ 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, *Septimoniau*, *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 23.⁴ 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,

⁴ 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.

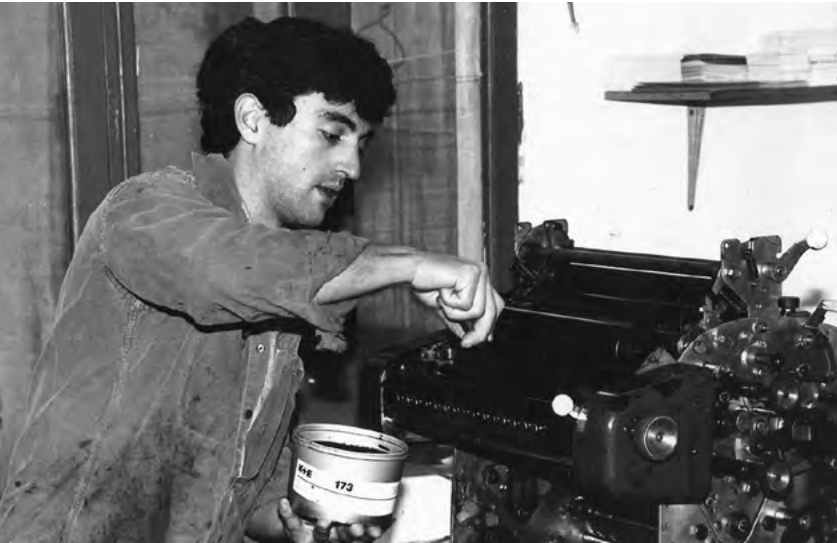


Fig. 4a, 4b Rafael Nomdedeu operating the printing press in the different OCMO's premises. Photographs by José García Poveda 'El Flaco', 1977–1979. Personal archive of Lola Nomdedeu.

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

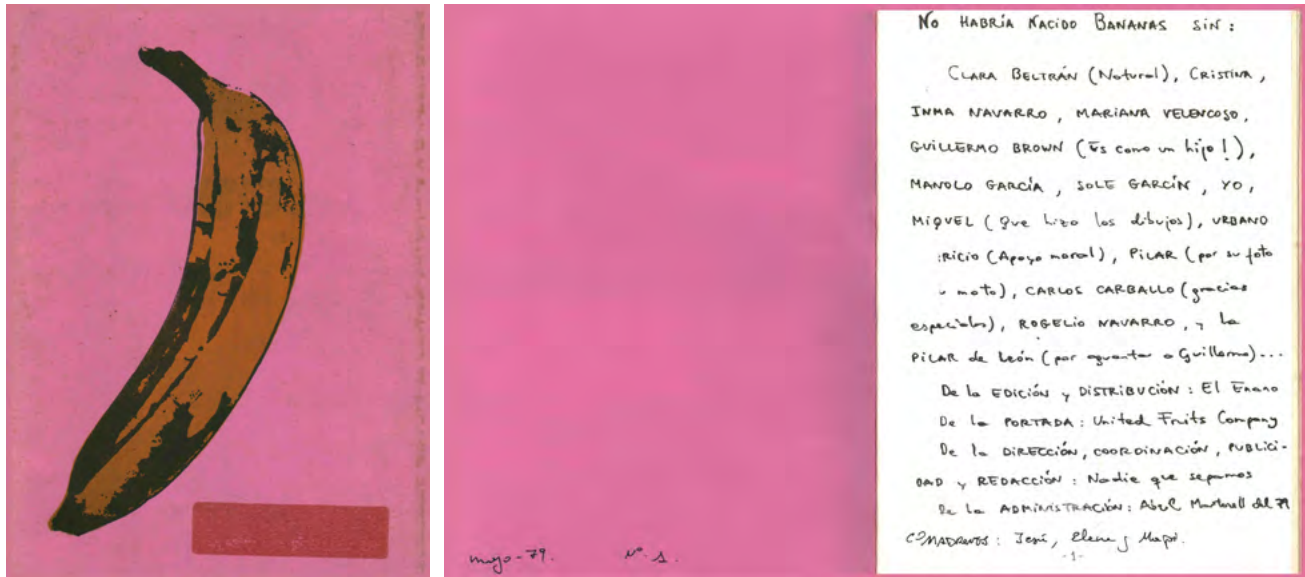


Fig. 5a, 5b Cover and editorial of *Bananas. Revista de libre creación* [Bananas. Free Creation Magazine] no. 1, May 1979. Uberto Stabile Papers, University of Huelva.

[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.

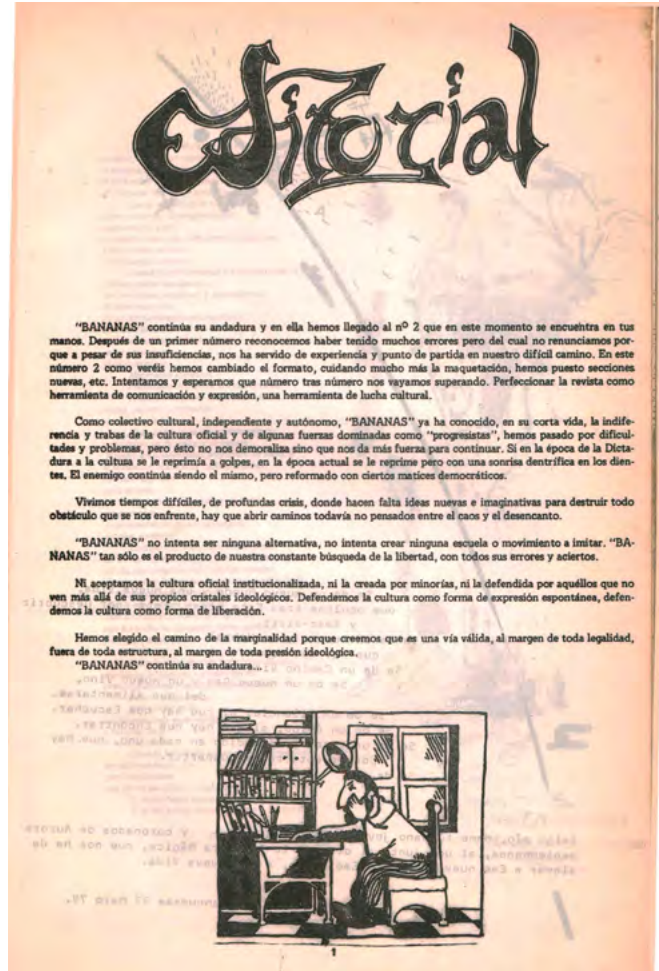


Fig. 6a, 6b Cover, and editorial of *Bananas. Revista de libre creación* no. 2, July 1979. Uberto Stabile Papers, University of Huelva.

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.

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Bidayat Magazine: to Radical Beginnings, Slow Thought and Collective Action

Interview with Cynthia Kreichati and Jana Traboulsi

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Bidayat was born in May 2012, at a moment when the Arab uprisings were inspiring new political, social, and intellectual horizons. As Cynthia Kreichati, a member of the editorial committee, and Jana Traboulsi, the magazine's art director, describe it, *Bidayat* emerged from the conviction that the time demanded renewed critical reflection and a rethinking of the role of knowledge production across the Arab region. The name *Bidayat* (Arabic for 'beginnings') expressed both an orientation toward new political and intellectual openings and a desire to revisit earlier experiments in Arab thought and culture.

While the launch of *Bidayat*'s first issue took place at Walimat Wardeh (a now-defunct café in Hamra's neighbourhood of Beirut, Lebanon), this conversation with the editors of the magazine took place over email and across continents, away from Beirut, where once all four writers involved in putting together this piece were based.¹ To reflect on this 10-year-long initiative and venture, which ended in 2023, this interview conducted with Kreichati and Traboulsi explored the beginnings, the objectives, and the challenges of putting together such a magazine for Arabic readers in the Arab world.²

This reflection comes at a time when the Arab world is going through wars, genocides, and what is often referred to as 'labour' in Arabic. This word, spelled مخاض *makhad*, alludes to the process of giving birth and is used as a metaphor for transition states that are difficult and/or painful and for which the results are pre-determined. As the editor-in-chief Fawwaz Traboulsi put it in his opening of the magazine's last published issue in 2023, *Bidayat*, its goals, scope, mission, and the

¹ The interview is based on written online exchanges and has been edited for clarity and concision.

² Referring to the countries currently part of the Arab league.



Fig. 1 *Bidayat* covers selection.
Image: courtesy of *Bidayat* team.

contributions of the people around it, would have little meaning without hope, understood not as an affect in the abstract but as a structure of feeling that one can work towards. And if *Bidayat* was born out of a desire to accompany a new season of change by way of transforming journalistic labour and cultural production, for Kreichati and Traboulsi the time now seems about right for similar things to occur.

María Gómez and Myriam Dalal: Let's start with the basics, what did you want this magazine to be?

Cynthia Kreichati and Jana Traboulsi: The magazine was born from a collective conviction that the region's upheavals demanded critical tools and historical perspective beyond the narrow frameworks of short-form political commentary, NGO discourse, or the language of international development organisations. *Bidayat* sought to offer a platform where reflection on revolution, democracy, and social

justice could be grounded in everyday realities across the region and challenge dominant paradigms of social and political thought.

Its aim was also contrapuntal in a way: to revisit the legacy of earlier intellectual and cultural experiments, and to provide a platform for new generations of writers, researchers, and artists to engage freely with the questions of their time. It positioned itself against the depoliticising logic of neoliberalism that had, for decades, reshaped Arab economies and subjectivities, producing inequality and eroding the social fabric. The magazine became a place where these dynamics (from privatisation, deregulation, and commodification to the dismantling of public life) could be interrogated through critical essays, memoirs, and art.

The magazine's founding members were steadfast in their belief that there was a place for a quarterly print magazine aimed at broader Arab publics and that its publishing rhythms, circulation, and depth could help reinvigorate intellectual and cultural work that is neither fleeting nor rushed.

MG/MD: Who was behind its creation?

CK/JT: The magazine was founded by a group of leftist militants and comrades: Fawwaz Traboulsi, Zuheir Rahhal, Ghassan Issa, and the late Sulaiman Takieddine. Historian and writer Fawwaz Traboulsi's longstanding engagement in political thought, his commitment to historical inquiry, critical traditions, and translation helped define the magazine's direction and tone. The quarterly's advisory editorial board included both established and emerging thinkers, writers, and artists from the region, like Adam Hanieh, Elias Khouri, Sahar Mandour, Boushra Maqtary, Farouk Mardam Bey, Rasha Salti, Maysoun Sukkarieh, and Salim Tamari. *Bidayat's* art director, graphic designer, and illustrator Jana Traboulsi, and her team, also played a key role in defining the magazine's visual character, which reflected its commitment to both contemporary independent publishing and the Arab Left's political and aesthetic legacies.

MG/MD: Who is *Bidayat's* audience?

CK/JT: *Bidayat* addresses a regional audience across the Arab world: academics, artists, students, and broader publics seeking critical, original perspectives on social and cultural life in the Arab world. Its readers are those dissatisfied with media that produces uncritical short form articles for swift consumption. The magazine strived to speak to an audience shaped by neoliberal precarity and disillusionment but still invested in collective action and thought. In this regard, the magazine built on a shared political and cultural commitment that links Beirut, Damascus, Tunis, Cairo, Baghdad, and beyond through the question of Palestine,

Fig. 2 *Bidayat* issue 12, 2015.
Image: courtesy of *Bidayat* team.



Fig. 3 Spread of book review *Florence and Baghdad: Renaissance Art and Arab Science* by Hans Belting in Kitab section, *Bidayat* issue 5, 2013. Image: courtesy of *Bidayat* team.

Fig. 4 Spread from a piece on Reza Abedini, in Ya Ayn section, *Bidayat* issue 3-4, 2012-2013. Image: courtesy of *Bidayat* team.



Fig. 5 Opening page of Zakira section, *Bidayat* issue 7, 2014. Image: courtesy of *Bidayat* team.

broader histories of anti-colonial struggles, socialist experiments, feminist organising, popular struggles, and the manifestations of, and responses to, neoliberalism.

MG/MD: Looking back at its history, can you describe the main ways the magazine has changed since its inception and, in this regard, how it has engaged with regional or transnational solidarities?

CK/JT: From its founding in 2012, *Bidayat* evolved from a space responding directly to the revolutionary moment into a broader and more sustained intellectual project engaging with the transformations, contradictions, and defeats that followed. Its early issues were strongly shaped by the Arab uprisings and the urgent need to think through questions of revolution, counter-revolution, and the meaning of collective action. Over time, the magazine expanded its thematic and disciplinary reach while maintaining its commitment to independence, critical inquiry, and a politics of emancipation. There were multiple issues dedicated to the study of neoliberalism and consumer society in Lebanon and the region, as well as several special dossiers on Palestine, memory, Arab cities, revolutions, popular culture, and tributes to thinkers like Edward Said and Etel Adnan. Visually, *Bidayat* also matured into a distinct and recognisable publication. Our visual identity carried the magazine's ethos with clarity, independence, and aesthetic and political experimentation. The careful integration of photography, illustration, and design transformed each issue into a beautiful material object of thought.

In terms of funding structures, *Bidayat* began as an entirely independent, self-funded initiative thanks to the support of the cultural club Al-Liqaa' and to donations from friends. Its early years relied largely on voluntary labour, modest subscriptions, and sales. Over time, and in response to the magazine's growing budget and workload, we diversified our sources of support while maintaining full editorial autonomy. While we received occasional project-based grants from cultural foundations aligned with *Bidayat*'s mission, this did not compromise its political and intellectual independence. This hybrid mode — combining reader support, partnerships, and small-scale funding — allowed *Bidayat* to remain both critical and viable for a solid decade.

We concluded our tenth year of publication with issue 36 (published in 2023) and suspended publication as we revisited our capacities. Shaped by pressing needs — from responding to Israel's genocide in Gaza and destruction across the region to navigating ongoing social and economic turmoil — as well as difficulties in securing funding and mobilising a community of writers and editors, the question of when and how to resume publication remains unsettled.

Fig. 6 *Bidayat*, table of contents (detail).
Image: courtesy of *Bidayat* team.



MG/MD: In a more practical way, how is the magazine distributed, both physically and digitally, and what considerations guide your approach to reaching audiences?

CK/JT: *Bidayat* was distributed mainly through independent bookstores, cultural centres, and subscriptions in Beirut, Baghdad, Cairo, Tunis, Rabat, Amman, and other cities. It was also distributed at conferences, festivals, exhibitions, Arabic book salons (through publishing houses like Dar al-Mutawassit, Dar Riyadh al-Rayess, and Snoubar Beirut) reaching both regional and diaspora readers. In Europe, it was available in independent bookstores in London, Paris, Marseille, Germany, and Belgium. For a few years, it was also directly printed in Palestine and Egypt. While *Bidayat* also exists online,³ our commitment was to print circulation as a political and aesthetic choice, valuing the slower, more reflective mode of engagement it fosters.

MG/MD: If we take a closer look at its contents, what kinds of articles did *Bidayat* publish?

CK/JT: The magazine's sections were multiple and diverse, ranging from theoretical reflection to the coverage of contemporary affairs. It also upheld a journalistic mission in two respects: to bring into the Arabic language thorough and critical work about the Arab region produced abroad and to cultivate a distinct visual and

³ <https://bidayatmag.com/>.



Fig. 7 Dossier icon for a dossier on Syria, *Bidayat* issue 3-4, 2012-2013. Image: courtesy of *Bidayat* team.

artistic identity. Contributions varied to include archival and documentary practices, analytical pieces, memoirs, and artistic, graphic, and literary expressions, with an editorial strategy that aimed at encouraging intellectual exchange. As already mentioned, several special issues and dossiers addressed the topic of Palestinian resistance and the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the section on memory and history, special issues focused on the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, the centenary of Lebanon’s founding in 1920, the centenary of the Russian Revolution of 1917, and others. In our section on thought and theory, the magazine published dossiers on Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, and Islamic thinkers such as Ali Shariati, Mahmoud Taleqani, and Mahmoud Muhammad Taha, and dedicated three issues to extensive research, studies, and analyses of neoliberalism and consumer society in Lebanon and the region.

Additionally, the magazine proposed sections rarely found in cultural journalism in Arabic: ‘The Right to the City’ on architecture, urbanism, and associated themes; ‘Popular Culture for the People’ on popular culture; and ‘Nahawand’ for

Arabic music. In the section 'Noon and the Pen', we published dossiers on literary giants like Abdul Rahman Munif and Edward Said, while the works of Etel Adnan, a dear friend of the magazine and collaborator, appeared in almost every issue. John Berger was also a frequent collaborator and friend. The 'Ya Ain' section (Arabic for 'Oh Eye!', a colloquial expression of astonishment in Arabic) featured dossiers and studies on artists like Diego Rivera and Amin al-Basha of Lebanon. Though we did publish regularly on these topics, we think we could have done more with regards to critical youth and feminist studies, interviews with intellectuals, artists, or militants, and the coverage of ongoing cultural activities in the different Arab cities where our team lived and worked.

MG/MD: In a digital age where much content circulates online, do you see *Bidayat* primarily as a material object? What significance do you give to its format, printing, and physical circulation, both in terms of the reader's experience and as a cultural or symbolic artifact? How does the physical form of the magazine contribute to its editorial mission and identity?

CK/JT: *Bidayat's* insistence on existing in print in a very challenging publishing landscape was key to the magazine's identity. First of all, *Bidayat* positioned itself as a hybrid between an academic journal and a magazine. This aspect of its identity is reflected in its form: its catchy, colourful magazine-like covers contrast with the more sober long reads and black and white images of the content inside. While *Bidayat's* content has a longer life span than most magazines — it is a quarterly and its approach to current affairs is analytical and reflexive — its physical form is that of a paperback. Similarly to paperbacks, it is sold at an economical price, allowing it to reach a large audience.

In its design, *Bidayat* is both nostalgic and contemporary: nostalgic in the way it references leftist publications of the 60s and 70s in its paper, type choices, use of calligraphic titles, black-ink-based graphics and coarse half-tone images. At the same time, *Bidayat* has been a lab for experimentation by proposing navigational and layout suggestions that act as contemporary digital interpretations of manuscript practices. In its later issues, it moved from typographic choices that imitate previous letterpress aesthetics to privilege more contemporary looking typefaces whose designs were inspired by modernist newspaper headlines.

The presence of *Bidayat* in print was significant in three main ways. First, very simply, for the reading and tactile experience of skimming through a magazine, going back and forth and stopping at some article, letting one's eye catch a sentence, bookmarking a page, or enjoying the mobility to carry a magazine and read it in different places. Second, *Bidayat's* interest in history is reflected not only in its sections and articles, but also in its desire to inscribe itself in the history of

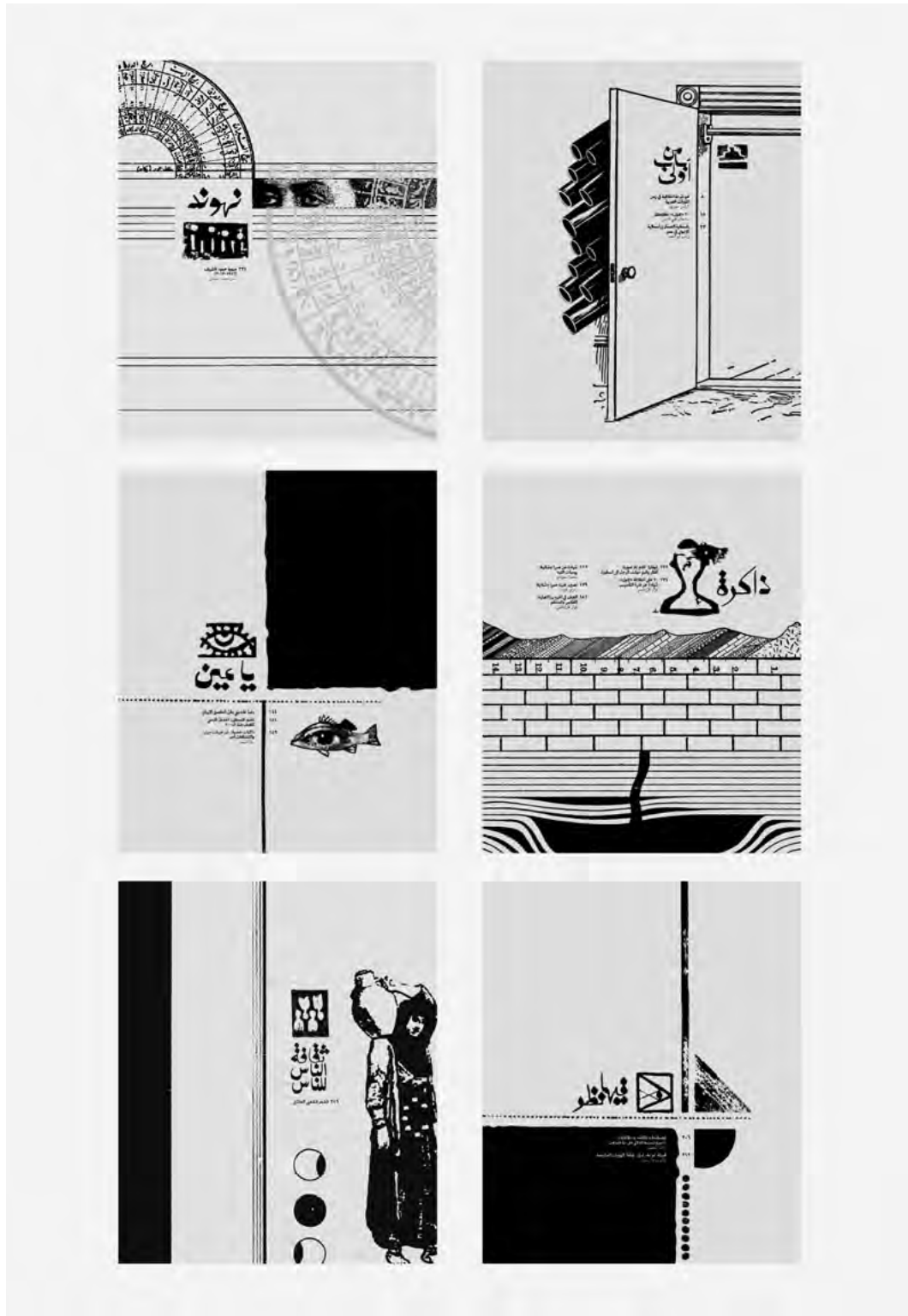


Fig. 8 Bidayat, selection of section opening pages. Image: courtesy of Bidayat team.

writing in the region, going through waves of social and political upheavals. While *Bidayat* makes all of its content accessible online, its print edition functions as a document and archive of a period undergoing a multitude of rapid changes.

Lastly, the circulation of *Bidayat* in the public sphere (in street kiosks, specific cafes and bookshops, in key publishers at book salons, or read in public or shared spaces) carries a strong political message. It is a leftist magazine and being associated with it as a seller or a reader is a form of public display of ideological adherence, and in its own way, a form of resistance to or rejection of various political contexts depending on country and time: either towards neoliberal economies, or against authoritarian regimes, etc.

MG/MD: Related to this, how do visual creations interact with editorial content to convey meaning and engage readers? In what ways does the visual component contribute to the magazine's editorial mission?

CK/JT: *Bidayat's* visual identity was linked to a time marked by pan-Arab nationalist and anticolonial leftist movements, and a period of rich political, intellectual, and artistic production. It somehow expressed its historical legacy: its logo and section titles are hand-drawn, using contemporary takes on calligraphic compositions; its section titles are executed using the linocut technique; and its dossiers' titles for the first three quarters of the magazine's lifespan were lettered. Its typographic palette ranges from typefaces and rules reminiscent of letterpress techniques or of bold modernist newspaper headlines. Overall, the feel of *Bidayat* is one in which its techniques of production are very present through the prominent traces of ink on paper, either left by the manual tracing of letters and icons, or by the typesetting and photo reproduction techniques used in magazines published between the 1950s and the 1980s. We also put great emphasis on the ways text and images added a dimension not present in the text or which produced new meanings.

We often chose images that either introduced the work of regional artists to our audience, or uncovered archival material curated after rigorous image research. Occasionally — and often for more abstract content like that of theoretical articles — typographic compositions, digital collages, and hand-drawn illustrations were used. They allow our visual content to convey meaning that is more abstract or sometimes symbolic. For instance, to illustrate an essay on Arabic Social Sciences by social scientist Ghassan Hage (Issue 6, summer 2013), the team of *Bidayat* conceived an infographic that used symbolic (and also playful) representations that made sense of theoretical concepts. Distinguishing between radicalism and critique on one hand, and political and analytical practice on the other, Hage traced two critical traditions in the production of knowledge. The infographic built on his theoretical discussion of Pierre Bourdieu's counter-political critique and Bruno

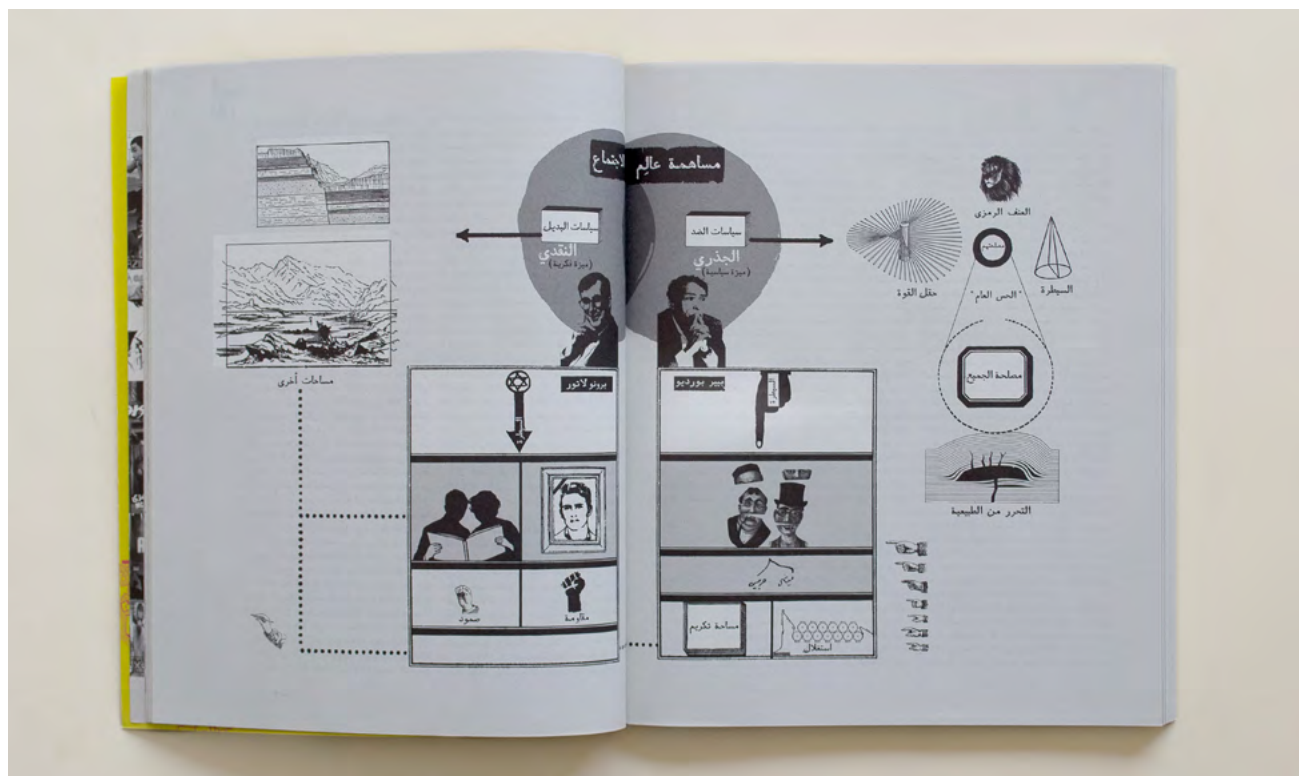


Fig. 9 Infographic for Ghassan Hage on Arab Social Sciences, *Bidayat* issue 6, 2013. Image: courtesy of *Bidayat* team.

Latour’s alter-political critique to highlight how social sciences might contribute to the region’s ongoing struggles.

MG/MD: On language and translation, could you expand on the magazine’s approach to the use of Arabic language and explain how (or if) multilingualism shaped your editorial practice and outreach?

CK/JT: *Bidayat* published in Arabic because it sought to reclaim a space for critical thought within the language that binds most of the region’s history and imagination, all while placing special emphasis on critical epistemic and political exchange. Translation is part of the magazine’s editorial practices, shaped by the magazine’s goals, its audience, and its editorial line.

Firstly, part of our approach entailed rendering accessible, in the Arabic language, the ideas, concepts, and knowledge produced about the region by researchers and thinkers who were based mostly (but not exclusively) in North America and Europe. Secondly, we had a keen interest in putting forth the experiences, cultural expressions, social movements, workers mobilisations, and political struggles of people and communities from the Global South. Translation



Fig. 10 Fiha Nazar opening section page, *Bidayat* issue 3-4, 2012-2013. Image: courtesy of *Bidayat* team.

thus enabled a dialogue between Arabic and intellectual and cultural traditions in other languages that are similarly aligned with popular movements. In addition to politics, we placed great emphasis on poetics too. For instance, *Bidayat* featured previously unpublished translations into Arabic of the works of poets such as Etel Adnan, Forough Farrokhzad, or Nazim Hekmat.

Further, our editor-in-chief and founder Fawwaz Traboulsi is a veteran translator, having brought a vast and rich intellectual production into the Arabic language including the work of Edward Said, John Berger, Antonio Gramsci, and the French poet Jacques Prévert (in collaboration with the poet Onsi al-Hajj). Finally, a third reason translation was important to the magazine's approach was the continual struggle to find contributors who can or want to write in Arabic.

MG/MD: *Bidayat* was defined as a magazine for a regional readership. What does 'regional' mean to you in this context and how are the different countries represented in the magazine connected historically, politically, or culturally?

CK/JT: In 2012, the initial impetus for *Bidayat* was to have an intellectual and cultural quarterly that could serve as a platform for leftist production and engage-

ment. The aim was to contribute to the reconsolidation of a Lebanese Left in an era of neoliberal globalisation that was affecting the Arab region in particular ways, and Lebanon's emergence from the Civil War. The editorial team saw the Arab uprisings as an unparalleled opportunity for the Left to articulate its visions, rebuild its forces, and renew its connection with its social base. This could not be done without recognising the interconnected histories and present conditions of Arab societies. The regionalism you are thus referring to is more of a political and cultural commitment rather than a territorial one *per se*. We adhere to a practice of solidarity where action addresses different aspects of the same struggle, with efforts directed at a similar, or complementary goal, or enacted against a common adversary (such as a military occupation, the forces of imperialism, capitalism, etc.). It is in that sense that our publication is regional too.

MG/MD: *Considering the political and social transformations across the region in recent decades — which is a key aspect of this monograph — what recurring themes or concerns do you see as common across post-authoritarian or transitional contexts? Are there issues that consistently resonate beyond national and regional borders, and in what ways do they connect to past experiments in alternative publishing?*

CK/JT: Let's start by saying the magazine's journey was not without obstacles and difficulties. It remains banned in Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, and Syria. Its distribution in Yemen stopped because of the war there. After more than a year of being printed and distributed in Egypt as a non-periodical book published by Dar al-Maraya, the authorities banned it under the pretext that it was a 'foreign publication'. More recently, the distributor in Tunisia requested that shipments of the magazine be suspended, for reasons that were not disclosed.

Now, on the question of post-authoritarian transitions, we have covered and critically reflected on this question in *Bidayat* to show how the dominant ways of thinking and talking about transitions were developed and implemented, in parallel with the consolidation of neoliberal policies, in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and different parts of the African continent. Dominant paradigms on transitions, associated with some North American academic circles and the work of international organisations, consider that transitional contexts, which happen to be countries mostly located outside of Western Europe and North America, require a form of political practice that is anchored in humanitarianism and that grapples with the legacies of war and violation. For example, take South Africa in 1995, which drew from these perspectives to create a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to tackle the legacy of the apartheid regime, a legacy formulated in terms of human rights crimes.

In the Arab region, international and local non-governmental organisations employed similar tools in contexts such as the aftermath of the Lebanese civil war and the 2011 Arab uprisings. Questions of memory and remembrance prevailed in the case of Lebanon, for example, while accountability for the past and respect for the rights and dignity of victims of state violence appeared to be more important in settings like Tunisia and Egypt. Seen through that lens, transitions are understood as a process that is related to human rights promotion while also being distinguished from it and premised upon a specific understanding of justice that juxtaposes dichotomous notions of good/evil, authoritarianism/democracy, violence/peace, conflict/post-conflict, and victims/perpetrators. These frameworks do not account for distributive justice and socio-economic equality. They connect processes and understandings of justice in these transitional contexts in a manner that requires the mending of human rights abuses and wrongdoings to make way for a new reconciled society, effectively displacing social and collective struggles and transforming them into human rights victimhood.

By implying that individuals must come to terms with and confront past human rights violations to move forward, this framing obscures the causes, consequences, and the social dynamics that underpin conflicts and at times legitimises and stabilises an authoritarian regime or a neoliberal consensus. This recasts violence by transforming war-torn states into market-dominated societies, implicitly promoting (and hence reinforcing) market-driven reforms by legitimising the reordering of state and society along the lines of a politics of human rights that neither addresses structural inequality nor entails radical demands — such as a redistribution of economic burden and losses, wealth, or land. Oddly enough, or perhaps not oddly at all, it is almost no longer fashionable to talk about transitional contexts or human rights abuses nowadays, at least not since the beginning of Israel's genocide in Gaza.

In contrast with the dominant outlooks, the 2011 uprisings and popular expressions in the street highlighted the close connections between neoliberal economies and authoritarian Arab regimes, and we sought to provide ample space to study the impact of neoliberalism and consumer culture on society, the state, politics, and culture in Lebanon and the Arab world. Thus, to answer your question about what emerges as 'common across post-authoritarian or transitional contexts', this is the kind of critical work we sought to contribute through *Bidayat*.

From *Souffles* to En Toutes Lettres: Moroccan Independent Publishing Across Generations

Interview with Kenza Sefrioui

Kenza Sefrioui is a cultural journalist, publisher, and literary critic based in Casablanca. Her engagement with the world of periodical publications and the editorial landscape in Morocco is both long-standing and multifaceted. From a scholarly perspective, her work is particularly remarkable in relation to the magazine *Souffles*, which she explored extensively in her PhD dissertation in comparative literature, and published in 2013 under the title *La revue Souffles, 1966-1973. Espoirs de révolution culturelle au Maroc* [The Journal *Souffles* (1966-1973), Hopes Of a Cultural Revolution In Morocco], as well as in her 2017 book *Le livre à l'épreuve, les failles de la chaîne au Maroc* [Books under Threat, Voids in the Publishing Ecosystem in Morocco], in which she provides a thorough analysis of the dynamics of the Moroccan publishing world.

Sefrioui's involvement with the editorial sphere extends to her current role as co-founder, together with Hicham Houdaifa, of the independent publishing house En Toutes Lettres (Casablanca), dedicated to essays and narrative journalism, where she also coordinates the project 'Arab Humanities' with Dar Mohamed Ali (Tunisia) and Dar Atlas (Syria), seeking to highlight and translate contemporary modern Arab production. Although *Souffles* and En Toutes Lettres emerged within different socio-political contexts and frameworks, both respond to a common need to serve as platforms of free expression for authors whose access to such spaces has been hindered, largely due to restrictions imposed by state institutions.

This contribution takes the form of a first-person testimonial in which Kenza Sefrioui looks back at these publishing experiences.¹ It is supplemented with ques-

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¹ An earlier version of this testimonial was published in French as Sefrioui, Kenza. 2020. 'Être éditeur au Maroc: La pensée au triple défi du marché, du droit et des libertés', *Relief — Revue électronique de littérature française* 14 (1): 32-48. doi:10.18352/relief.1065. The English translation is by Anna M. Drzewiecki. We would like to thank Kenza Sefrioui for generously allowing us to publish an edited version of this article and for answering our questions.



Fig. 1 Kenza Sefrioui. Image: Mohamed Drissi.
Courtesy of Kenza Sefrioui.

tions addressed to Sefrioui by the editors of this special issue, related to the main ideas, questions, and problems underpinning it. The text draws parallels between the historical trajectory of *Souffles*, which sought to diversify the publishing world after Morocco's independence in 1956, and the current work of *En Toutes Lettres* in a presumably 'post-authoritarian' situation, yet not free from repression.

Lola Visglerio-Gómez and Juliane Debeusscher: *Could you tell us about the barriers or difficulties that have historically existed — or continue to exist — with respect to progressive, experimental, or alternative publishing in Morocco, in light of your own experience?*

Kenza Sefrioui: It is impossible to talk about publishing in Morocco without connecting it to other key players in the production and dissemination of knowledge and ideas. One of the most important is the public education system. Since Moroccan independence in 1956, public schools have embodied the duality of the hope for social advancement and the failures of the government. Overcrowded classes, rote learning techniques, violence... The state of public education is now in total

disarray. Partial illiteracy remains very high at 40% on average, illiteracy is around 70%; nearly 250.000 high school students abandon their studies each year without a diploma, leaving 1.7 million young people aged between fifteen and twenty-four with no studies, technical training, or employment. It is clear that school curricula do not instill a love of reading.

This dramatic situation is the result of various failed attempts at Arabisation and multiple ineffective reforms following an era of repression, from which Moroccans carry painful memories. Among them, the deadly repression of 23 March 1965 against students protesting the Ministry of Education's decree prohibiting access to the second cycle of secondary schools for people over the age of seventeen. A few days later, King Hassan II denounced schools on television as a 'place of training for dissent' (Rollinde 2002: 122) and declared: 'There is no danger as serious for the State as that of the so-called intellectual. You would be better off illiterate!' (Rollinde 2002: 46). Three years later, in 1968, at the request of the Royal Cabinet, the anthropologist Mohamed Chafik drew up a report on the state of education and advocated the abolition of Koranic schools, calling them 'one of the main causes of our civilisational backwardness'. In response to his report, he was subsequently ordered to advocate for their generalisation (Aït Mous and Ksikes 2014: 46).

In the same way schools were seen as potential sites for the promotion of rebellious attitudes, universities (the first, Mohammed V University, was founded in Rabat in 1959) were stifled and crushed as poles of production for critical thought. Repressive actions included closure of the Institute of Sociology in Rabat in 1970, the Arabisation of the philosophy curriculum, reducing it to the most rigid Islamic thinking, and the radical rupture between high school and university level studies, with the Arabisation of public education in the early 1980s and the maintained prevalence of French in universities. The aim was to re-traditionalise society through reliance on religion (Daoud 2007).

After thirty years of this policy, universities were no longer able to play their role as centres of critical thinking. The *coup de grace*: structural adjustment plans in 1983 demanded the dismantling of the public sector and kept access to quality education in the private sector for wealthy, mainly urban, Moroccans. This neo-liberal reality was coupled by the rise to power of political forces who sought to centralise the role of religion in the state. Today, we are experiencing the consequences of this discourse, both reactionary and neoliberal, which has penetrated minds and threatens individuals' agency over their own existence (Bessis 2014).

LVG/JD: This historical erosion of intellectual infrastructure extends beyond the university and the educational system. How does it affect the broader cultural and publishing landscape?

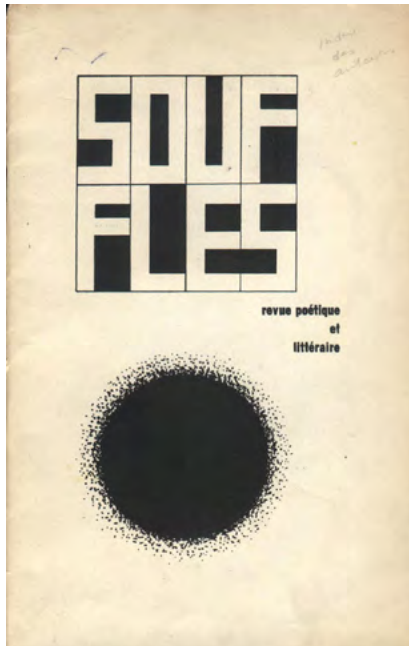


Fig. 2 *Souffles*, first quarter, 1966.
Image: Internet Archive.
<https://archive.org/details/Souffles/Souffles%201%20-%201966/>

KS: To begin with, in Morocco, there is no governmental structure to monitor the distribution of books, which is essential for the transmission of information between publishers and booksellers before publication. Moreover, simply selling books in bookshops is not enough. First and foremost because Morocco's network of bookshops is extremely weak. From 2012 to 2014 I conducted a survey on books, publishing, and literacy as part of the 2014 General Assembly on Culture, an initiative supported by the Racines Association (ArtMap 2014). In this study, I counted no more than eight hundred bookshops in the whole country, where thirty-eight million people live. Among them, no more than fifteen or so are active all year round with staff trained to help readers and able to host gatherings and author talks. This is a fragile infrastructure, threatened by competition from distributors who sell directly, especially to schools, taking advantage of the fact that there are no laws to set ceilings on book prices and discounts.

In addition, and despite obvious needs, the authorities' inaction has kept the publishing sector in a precarious state. The Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports is not committed to establishing the legislative and administrative frameworks required for its development. No official policy has been created to regulate public access to books, which creates serious deficiencies in infrastructure. There are no more than two hundred and forty public libraries nationwide: less than a third of the municipalities have them, with deserts in rural areas where only civil society is active in promoting literacy (*Étude sur l'Édition* 2014).

Some university towns have neither a library nor a bookshop. Furthermore, their acquisition budgets are very low and Morocco, with an estimated one and a half million books across all its libraries, is far from the standard UNESCO recommends: at least one book per inhabitant. Under these conditions, and considering the disappearance of bookshops, the price of books has emerged as an acute issue, aggravating existing inequalities in access to knowledge and culture.

LVG/JD: Your career, both as a researcher and as a publisher, has demonstrated the significant role played by periodicals in contexts of political change or transition. You have conducted extensive research on *Souffles*, a poetry and culture magazine that emerged after Morocco's independence, in a context of decolonisation and nation-building. Where do you think the significance of *Souffles* lies within this period of political, social, and cultural change in the country?

KS: In the 1960s and 1970s, the State felt increasingly threatened by a highly politicised left-wing student population and responded by stifling any hint of critical thinking. In this context, cultural magazines like *Souffles*, but also *Lamalif*, which were very active at the time, served as hubs for the development of collective thought and intellectual and political mobilisation. All were censored (Sefrioui 2013).²

² *Lamalif* was published between 1966 and 1988 by Zakya Daoud and Mohamed Loughlam, in French. It was conceived as a political and cultural alternative after the events of 1965 and the repression of popular democratic aspirations by the monarchy (Daoud 2007) [Editor's note].

Souffles is a milestone in Morocco's cultural and political history. Founded in Rabat in 1966 by a small group of French-speaking poets, it spearheaded a powerful intellectual movement during its seven years of existence, and raised questions that are still highly relevant today. I started my research on *Souffles* in 2002, first as part of a master's degree and then within my PhD dissertation in comparative literature, which I defended in June 2010 at Paris IV-Sorbonne University. At the same time, I was a journalist in charge of literary criticism at *Le Journal hebdomadaire*, an independent French-language magazine created in 1997. My work was therefore greatly influenced by the debates of that period and made me aware of the political importance of *Souffles*.

Initially, the magazine was a purely poetic project. Abdellatif Laâbi, Mostafa Nissabouri, and Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine — all three under the age of thirty and dissatisfied with the cultural scene — had decided to create their own literary and poetic platform. The first issue was a simple collection of poems, accompanied by works by artists who taught at the Casablanca School of Fine Arts (Farid Belkahia, Mohammed Chabâa, and Mohammed Melehi, who designed the magazine).³ A thunderous prologue by Laâbi set the tone: *Souffles* wanted to be a forum open to all innovative research. It dealt with literature, but also cinema, theatre, and the visual arts, being both a creative and analytical magazine with a rebellious tone: it questioned the absence of cultural policy, the prevailing neocolonialism, and the archaisms of Moroccan society. *Souffles* took strong positions: it rejected the racialisation of culture that its founders perceived in the Negritude movement, it rehabilitated the writer Driss Chraïbi, who had been denigrated since the publication of *Passé simple* in 1954, and it protested against those who accused French-language writers of betraying the country's cause.

Souffles soon attracted many talented writers from Morocco, the Maghreb, and the entire Third World. It was the first magazine in Morocco to open up dialogue between French-speaking and Arabic-speaking writers. Between 1968 and 1969, three bilingual issues were produced to showcase new writers such as Mohammed Berrada, Driss El Khoury, and Mohammed Zafzaf. And not only writers. This was a time of great proximity and interaction between creators from all disciplines: the magazine reported on art exhibitions, accompanied the work of filmmakers, and commented on the work of theatre professionals.

Most of these artists and poets came from middle-class backgrounds and were part of the tiny minority who had received higher education. One of the major concerns of the group, loyal readers of Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire, was the role of the intellectual in a Third World country. They could not conceive culture as anything other than the driving force behind the social transformations to which they aspired. They were very attentive to key issues of their time, be it the repression

³ The Casablanca School of Fine Arts was a pioneering space for artistic and pedagogical renewal in post-independent Morocco, integrating modernist approaches with traditional Moroccan crafts and visual languages. The school played a key role in rethinking art's role in society through a postcolonial lens (see Lakrissa 2018) [EN].



Fig. 3 *Souffles*, issue 15, 1969.
Image: Internet Archive.
<https://archive.org/details/Souffles/Souffles%2015%20-%201969/mode/2up>

of the left and social movements in Morocco (in particular, the March 1965 riots in Casablanca), the decolonisation movement, the Israeli-Palestinian question, May 1968, or internal rivalries within the Soviet bloc. The importance of these debates led some authors to become increasingly involved in the political arena. Some of them were active in national left-wing parties, like the Union Nationale des Forces Populaires (UNFP) and the Parti de la Libération et du Socialisme (PLS), from which they eventually broke away to form various branches of the Moroccan Marxist-Leninist movement.

Souffles underwent a turning point in its history between 1969 (issue 15 was a special edition on the Palestinian Revolution) and 1970. Some members, including Abdellatif Laâbi and Abraham Serfaty, wanted to politicise the magazine, turning it into a forum for the development of a common reflection between the Marxist-Leninist groups Ilal Amam and 23 Mars. This politicisation precipitated repression: in January 1972, the magazine's main contributors were arrested, tortured, and sentenced to long prison terms during the political trials of 1973 and 1977. *Souffles* ceased its publication in Morocco and was relaunched in Paris by activists in exile. These new series in Arabic and French circulated clandestinely in Morocco. Their aim was to denounce human rights violations and raise awareness of the cause of political prisoners. The tone became very virulent. However, by the end of 1973, Ilal Amam and 23 Mars had fallen out, particularly with respect to the issue of Western Sahara, and each movement decided to abandon this united platform and launch its own magazine.

LVG/JD: This special issue explores the connections between periodical publications and post-dictatorial or post-authoritarian periods in a way that is both situated and diachronic. In this regard, we find it particularly noteworthy that *Souffles* — and, by extension, its context — is arousing renewed interest from various scholarly, curatorial, and artistic initiatives, several decades after its end.⁴ In your opinion, to what extent does this historical episode and phenomenon remain valid and relevant in the present?

KS: The recent recovery of *Souffles* must be understood within the context of the repression that fell upon any sign of dissent, and consequently, the veil of silence that shrouded the magazine, which was deemed subversive. Some people got rid of the issues they owned out of fear: at the 1973 trial, the defendants — among them high school students — were presented with a copy of the magazine in French and Arabic as evidence. For a long time, *Souffles* was studied only abroad, and only from the perspective of its contribution to literary and cultural modernity, with no reference to its political dimension. While its legacy remained vivid in the

⁴ For example, the journal held a special place in the first 'Invocação' of the 36th São Paulo Biennial, titled 'Souffles: On Deep Listening and Active Reception', which took place in Marrakesh in 2024. It was also featured in the exhibition 'Moroccan Trilogy', held at the Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid in 2021, as well as in the accompanying public programme [EN].

collective memory of Marxist-Leninist activists, outside academic and activist circles Moroccan youth remain unaware of this history.

As far as conservation and diffusion are concerned, the issues of *Souffles* held at the General Library of Rabat were not properly preserved and were even looted. From 1997 to 2007, Thomas C. Spear of the City University of New York and Anne George of the University of Seattle digitised the journal, paving the way for its rediscovery. In addition, the Moroccan press, which experienced something of a revival in the late 1990s, devoted articles to *Souffles*, seeking a symbolic connection, more or less explicitly. Finally, in 2010, Abdellatif Laâbi authorised the National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco to publish the journal online.⁵

Souffles reflected the collective imagination of its time, in its articulation with major political issues. But beyond that, it formulated a project of opposition to the dictatorship of Hassan II, particularly through its reflection on national culture. By creating the Association de recherche culturelle (ARC) in 1968, the magazine intended to 'contribute, through creative work and cultural mobilisation, to the liberation struggle waged by all the progressive forces in the country' (Various Authors 1968). It did not limit its cultural remit to aesthetic issues or entertainment events, but saw it as a melting pot for the development of a project that engaged the whole of society, a deeply political project that embraced cultural, social, economic, and political issues. The aim was to define a long-term project for Morocco.

This purpose, central to the magazine, had two objectives: to complete the decolonisation of Morocco by decolonising culture, freeing it from the distorting visions of colonialism and neocolonialism; and, above all, to oppose the re-traditionalisation of Moroccan society by the monarchy, which, in order to establish its authoritarian project, retained only the archaic and retrograde aspects of tradition, and limited Moroccan identity to Arabness and Islam.

Souffles, on the contrary, was interested in the modern and universal aspects of popular tradition and rejected its folklorisation for mainly tourist purposes. It refused to obscure the Amazigh and Jewish heritages and continued to carry the hope of a united Maghreb. In this sense, its resolutely modernist and liberating project proposed a restructuring of culture and values, a veritable cultural revolution in Morocco. The repression that struck the magazine and its authors, and the political measures that followed (the sabotage of education, particularly in the humanities, the marginalisation of culture and intellectuals, etc.) show that the authorities were not mistaken about the subversive nature of *Souffles*.

These debates have come back into the spotlight over the past decades. Civil society, particularly the human rights movement, has played a major role in this. The death of Hassan II in 1999 and the dismissal of Driss Basri, the Minister of

⁵ However, access is no longer active, which appears to indicate the fragility of these agreements. The full contents of the issues of *Souffles* were made available by Abdellatif Laâbi: <http://laabi.net/souffles/> [EN].



Fig. 4 *Le Journal hebdomadaire*, special edition, no. 219, July-September 2005.

Internal Affairs who embodied the repressive system, contributed to a relative easing of the political climate. The creation of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission, whose mission was to shed light on the crimes committed by the State during the so-called Years of Lead, as well as the publication of numerous testimonies by former political prisoners, made it possible to revisit this period.

This account was necessary, given that this memory had been obscured for many years for obvious political reasons. It is essential today to remember that intellectuals and artists opposed the dictatorship and that, despite the violence of the repression, their progressive ideas were not crushed. Their questions about the recognition of minorities found an echo in the demands of civil society, particularly in the movement that worked for the recognition of Amazigh culture. In other words, the recognition of Morocco's cultural diversity is not a recent development, and older and younger generations, whether in the artistic, intellectual, or activist spheres, have everything to gain by coming together to share their respective experiences. In 2013 I published the book *La revue Souffles, 1966-1973* to help reopen the debate.

LVG/JD: While conducting your research on *Souffles*, you were working at *Le Journal hebdomadaire*, which emerged precisely during the period of openness that seemed to follow the death of Hassan II. After its closure, you embarked on a new path, shifting from involvement in journalism to founding a publishing house, *En Toutes Lettres*. What led you to take this direction, and what implications has it had for your longstanding political and activist engagement with critical and independent publishing in Morocco?

KS: *En Toutes Lettres* was born from the regression of press freedoms that started in January 2010 when *Le Journal hebdomadaire*, where Hicham Houdaïfa and I worked, was shut down. This francophone weekly magazine was founded in 1997 during the transition between the reign of Hassan II and Mohammed VI and remained the gem of the independent press throughout the 2000s. But the feeling was short-lived: its critical tone against the government, especially on economic policy, led to years of judicial harassment and advertising boycotts. We were also aware of the changes in our profession with the rise of digital media. The race to produce images and 'content' is incompatible with the time it takes to investigate. Moreover, with editorial teams now made up of very small salaried staff and freelancers, journalists do not have the time or other resources to work on long-term projects.

En Toutes Lettres was therefore born in refusal of this double constraint: the invasion of the media by filler and self-censorship, and the diktat of speed. The book sector seemed to us, in spite of its difficulties, a possible alternative to make accessible this work of searching for the truth and the general interest, which is

indispensable to inform our citizens and to foster public debate. The book is also a more sustainable advocacy tool than a periodical to address causes that are close to our hearts: human rights, women's rights, social justice, etc. We are close to several civil society associations fighting against customary marriage, such as the Ytto Foundation, and for the recognition of culture as a lever for social and human development, such as Racines.⁶

The desire to continue our work of journalistic investigation has naturally led us to specialise in the essay. Apart from children's publishing, most Moroccan press is generalist, publishing both fiction and nonfiction. Numerous works on Morocco, most of them of high quality, are written and published abroad. That is why it seemed necessary to us, especially given the country's colonial history, to publish essays on Morocco *in* Morocco. We believed this would help make our fellow citizens and the world aware of Moroccan viewpoints of our own realities and work towards establishing Morocco as a central production site of its own analyses. Especially since Morocco is still not the central hub of its own writing.

The continuity between *En Toutes Lettres* and *Le Journal hebdomadaire* is evident in the way the publishing house operates. We initiate and commission most editorial projects through careful reflection on important current affairs that may require several years of research and writing. The most basic point of continuity, however, is the shared commitment to popularising knowledge and to disseminating a culture of debate and critical thinking. We are committed to making challenging texts accessible, both in form and content. Also, just like *Le Journal hebdomadaire*, our approach at *En Toutes Lettres* is grounded in our independence. While we are close to civil society organisations, we are not affiliated with any association or political party. This freedom has allowed us to join the International Alliance of Independent Publishing (alliance-editeurs.org) in 2019, a network for solidarity, self-reflection, and advocacy within the industry for the notion of bibliodiversity.

Since our first publication in 2014, *En Toutes Lettres* has built a catalogue of twenty-six titles under five collections: 'Les Presses de l'Université Citoyenne' [The Citizen University Press], that focuses on the popularisation of research in the humanities and social sciences, and that became last year 'Économies, sociétés et humanités' [Economies, Societies and Humanities]; the 'Droit et Citoyenneté' [Rights and Citizenship] collection, which consists of guides to help people understand the law; 'Traduction' [Translations], which invites readers, through bilingual books, to rethink epistemological frameworks; 'Les Questions qui fâchent' [Controversial Questions], a collection that owes its title to Asma Lamrabet's essay 'Islam et femmes, les questions qui fâchent' [Islam and Women, Controversial Questions] and that aims to deconstruct representations of controversial subjects

⁶ The organisation, established in 2010, was sued and then dissolved in 2019 for hosting the shooting of a satirical show, '1 Dîner 2 Cons', which the prosecution considered a threat to state institutions and Islam [EN].

Fig. 5 En Toutes Lettres. Selection of publications.
Image: courtesy of Kenza Sefrioui.



and to propose other interpretations to calm heated topics enough for generative discourse; and the heart of our project, the ‘Enquêtes’ [Investigations] collection, dedicated to investigative journalism and open to the work of researchers and scholars.

Our catalogue is primarily francophone, with twenty-one titles in French, four titles in Arabic, and one that is bilingual. En Toutes Lettres is thus aligned with the tradition of the French-speaking press and publishing. This tradition is in decline in Morocco and it is linked to the Arabisation of education over the past

forty years. However, French remains the language of the elites in Morocco, and has even become a language of caste, condemning — though not written into law — those who do not master it to subaltern careers. This is partly the reason why we try to offer our fellow citizens accessible works in French, so they may access the content while continuing to strengthen their knowledge of the language. As we see it, this is a matter of democracy.

Yet such accomplishments are relative. We know the context in which we operate, and we are not unaware of the difficulties. Since 2005, my work as a literary critic and cultural journalist has enabled me to understand the overarching problems in this field, which I have written about in my 2017 book, *Le livre à l'épreuve, les failles de la chaîne au Maroc*. Despite the immensity of these issues, it seemed essential to take them on. So much is at stake. My research on *Souffles*, a magazine that manifested a true humanist vision in Morocco, opened my eyes to the political dimension of cultural work. Moreover, Hicham Houdaïfa, through his work as a reporter since the 1990s, measured the societal consequences of the deprivation of access to school, books, and culture.

If *En Toutes Lettres* aims to situate itself as a hub and refuge for the production of humanist thought from the Global South, the challenges remain numerous. For example, the international circulation of works published in Morocco raises significant questions. On the one hand, the closure of borders hinders the circulation of books and ideas within the Maghreb, and the entire intellectual life of our countries, which are so close, pays the price for this nonintegration. And I don't even consider the possibility of publishing books from further afield in our continent, due to the cost of the transport, taxes, and custom duties, sometimes unduly imposed.

But above all, we still ask: how can you export ideas when you don't come from a society that is considered worthy or capable of such intellect? What happens when we are perceived via prejudices, often racist and islamophobic, that distort and inhibit understanding of our realities? How can we create more balanced and just discourse? This work is ongoing. It is both material and spectral. And it demands our attention. In the meantime, in Morocco, thirty-eight million citizens are waiting to gain access to a basic human right, still not guaranteed: the right to knowledge.

LVG/JD: Given the demands and protests of the younger generations (so-called Gen Z) that erupted in Morocco in the autumn of 2025 (when we were working on this interview), how do you think these ideas have carried through to the present day? What role should the independent editorial sector play in giving visibility or amplifying these demands?

KS: One of the main demands of the young people who have spoken out in the GenZ 212 movement is the right to quality education. And the right to memory and history are fundamental elements of education, because without them, our fellow citizens can't have the tools they need to participate in public debate in an informed manner. Of course, independent publishing, in conjunction with research but also with all the structures likely to relay this work, such as the press, libraries, etc., is at the heart of this project. But we still have a lot to do to consolidate our ecosystem, in order to lift our society up.

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