

# ESCRITOS EN LA CALLE

WRITTEN ON THE STREETS



#### Escritos en la calle / Written on the Streets

Fernando Aíta, Leandro Giovinazzi, Alejandro Güerri, Tomy Lucadamo.

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Los grafitis, incluso los más racionales, son siempre el resultado de un apasionamiento, un furor que necesita ser dicho o mostrado a todos. Con firma o desde el anonimato, es la voluntad incontenible de expresar y comunicarse, muchas veces corriendo el riesgo de ser sorprendidos infraganti, con la pintura fresca. Y esa adrenalina es un elemento no menor en estas prácticas.

Este libro es un homenaje a todas las personas que salen a escribir y a pintar en la calle, las que se frenan a mirar, las que registran ese encuentro casual y fugaz con un grafiti. Un homenaje a todos los que habitamos este suelo, compartiendo nuestro andar, dejando huellas, y que, a través de los grafitis, miramos la ciudad con otros ojos.

El camino a este libro y el interés en el tema aparecieron en el 2002. Primero, como una sección en un periódico digital de literatura, **Ñusléter** www.niusleter.com.ar, donde se publicaban transcripciones de grafitis, frases que las lectoras y lectores anotaban con su calle o barrio, y nos mandaban por correo electrónico.

Desde 2009, la sección se independizó y se convirtió en un sitio especialmente dedicado a eso: **GRaFiTi** www.escritosenlacalle.com, una plataforma colaborativa en la que cualquiera puede subir fotos de grafitis. De ese archivo colectivo, provienen las imágenes de este libro, una selección sobre un total de 5.000 fotos, enviadas por más de 500 personas. En esta edición participan más de 40 fotógrafos y fotógrafas, profesionales y aficionados.

Con la palabra "grafitis" queremos dar cuenta de una cantidad de manifestaciones que comparten el hecho de ser pintadas en la calle. Mayormente son anónimas, muchas veces realizadas sin autorización, e incluyen varias técnicas y estéticas: escritos, pintadas, dibujos, grafiti hip-hop, murales, *street art*, hechos con aerosol, látex, marcador, pegatinas y más. En nuestro recorte predominan los grafitis que usan la palabra escrita como medio de expresión. Formas condensadas de la literatura popular.

Como en cualquier asunto que se investique, hay pioneros, antecedentes remotos y hallazgos tardíos, pero gran parte de los grafitis que nuestras calles lucen hov. tuvieron sus inicios en la vuelta de la democracia. En los años 80 las pintadas expresaban un alivio por la recuperación de libertades, y la necesidad de elaborar el horror y la oscuridad. La pintura en aerosol era una novedad. Y se podía salir de noche, el momento propicio para una práctica considerada ilegal. Entonces, los grafitis reunían la estética rockera, contracultural, el humor popular, y un pensamiento crítico, a veces irónico. Proliferaban las frases, con ideas o sentimientos puestos en palabras ingeniosas.

En los años 90, globalización mediante, las nuevas tecnologías de comunicación dieron paso a una cultura más visual. Los viajes al exterior, posibles por la convertibilidad, abrieron las puertas al tráfico de influencias. En una década signada por el diseño y el

acceso masivo a nuevos medios de producción (computadoras, impresoras), se vio la expansión de la técnica del esténcil. Y las primeras apariciones de grafitis de origen neoyorkino, arraigados en la cultura hiphopera: tags, bombas y piezas, firmas y dibujos destinados principalmente a la comunidad de iniciados. Ambos estilos tienen algo en común, se basan en la reiteración, en repetir muchas veces en distintos lugares una misma imagen o caligrafía.

En la década del 2000, se consolidaron distintas vertientes del arte callejero (street art). Murales pintados al látex, o hechos con esténciles, con paletas de colores y trazos definidos. Obras de grandes dimensiones realizadas con extensores o andamios. La aparición del "muñeguismo": personajes (characters) en situaciones alucinógenas, con una estética inspirada en las historietas. Derivaciones estilísticas (post-grafiti) donde el límite entre letra y dibujo se vuelve poroso, y las firmas se convierten en figuras geométricas, abstracciones, puras combinaciones de formas y colores. Aunque son preeminentemente pictóricas, varias de estas piezas incluyen frases o dedicatorias.

Más allá de las tendencias, la frase pintada con aerosol o marcador es una constante

y nunca pierde su vigencia. Una forma de expresión básica y eficaz, muy accesible, que no requiere destreza técnica, y ni siquiera buena ortografía. Pueden leerse citas, pero en su mayoría se trata de textos anónimos. Cambian las palabras, las referencias, las caligrafías, pero las pintadas de frases sostienen su capacidad de emocionar, de estimular la imaginación, de abrir sentidos...

Nuestra selección de grafitis privilegió expresiones características de la cultura local. Buscamos rasgos propios del imaginario y el habla de los argentinos. Buscamos signos y rastros en el fútbol, en la música, en la política, en las formas autóctonas de expresar el amor, y en un amplio conjunto de ideas e intuiciones que podríamos llamar "pensamiento".

Creemos que es un muestrario representativo de lo que se pinta en nuestro país. Un registro de la oralidad, un archivo lingüístico, de tipografías, de imágenes, de ideas y sentimientos que se expresan en la calle. Una mirada plural que reúne algunas páginas sueltas del incesante libro colectivo que se lee en las paredes.

Disfruten.

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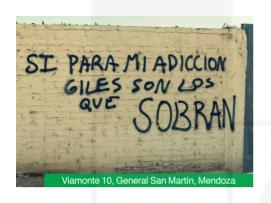


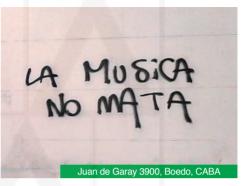














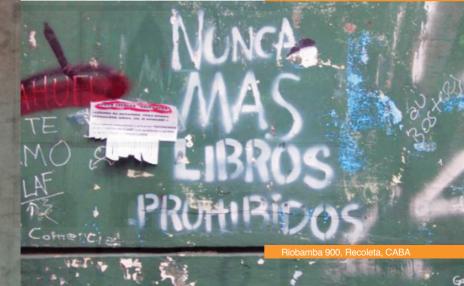


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## WRITTEN ON THE STREETS

#### **PROLOGUE**

Graffiti, even the most rational ones, are always the result of a passion, an intensity that needs to be shown or told to everyone. Signed or anonymous, they represent the irrepressible wish to express and communicate oneself, many times taking the risk of being surprised *in fraganti*, with the paint still wet. And that adrenaline is an important element in these practices.

This book pays homage to all the people who go out writing and painting in the streets, to those who stop to watch, to those who register that casual, brief meeting with graffiti. It is an homage to all of us who live in this land sharing paths and leaving traces, and who, through graffiti, look at our cities through different eyes.

The road to this book and our interest in the topic began in 2002. First, there was a section in a digital literary magazine, Nusléter www.niusleter.com.ar, where we published transcriptions of graffiti: phrases that readers wrote down (with the name of the street or neighborhood), and sent us by e-mail.

In 2009, that section became independent and we developed a website especially for that purpose: GRaFiTi <a href="www.escritosenlacalle.com">www.escritosenlacalle.com</a>, a collaborative platform enabling anyone to upload photos of graffiti and their location. The images in this book come from that collective archive: a

selection from over 5000 pictures, sent by more than 500 people. This edition includes more than fifty professional and amateur photographers.

With the word 'graffiti' we mean to account for different expressions that share the fact of being painted in the streets. For the most part they are anonymous, many times made without authorization, and they include various techniques and aesthetics: writings, paintings, drawings, hiphop, stencils, murals, street art, made with aerosol, latex, markers, stickers, glue and paper, and more. In making our selection, we paid attention to those graffiti that use the written word as a means of expression, that is, condensed forms of literature

Like in any other topic that one investigates, there are pioneers, remote precedents and late finds, but many of the graffiti that our streets display today saw their beginnings with the return to democracy. During the early 80s, these paintings expressed relief associated with recovered liberties on the one hand, and the need to elaborate the horror and obscurity of the last dictatorship (1976-1983) on the other. Spray-paint was something new. And people could go out at night, the most propitious moment for a practice considered to be illegal. Then, graffiti were characterized by rock, counter-cultural aesthetics, critical thinking, popular humor and irony. On the walls, phrases proliferated: ideas or feelings wittily worded.

During the 90s with the globalization process, the new technologies of communication made way for more visual cultures. Also, many Argentine people traveled abroad due to the parity between the peso and the dollar, and opened the gates to new exchanges of influences. In a decade marked by design and the access to new means of production (computers, printers, the Internet), the use of stencils expanded. Graffiti inspired by writers from New York, related to the Hip Hop culture: tags, bombs and pieces, sophisticated signatures and drawings were mainly aimed at the community of those 'in the know'. Both styles (techniques) have something in common; they are based on reiteration, on repeating the same image or calligraphy many times, in different places.

After 2000 we saw a consolidation of different currents of street art. There were murals painted with latex, or made with layers of stencils, with defined palettes and strokes and huge works crafted by means of extension sticks, scaffolds or ladders. 'Characters' inspired by comics, in hallucinated situations appeared. Stylistic derivations ('postgraffiti') arose where the border between letter and drawing becomes blurred: signatures turn into geometrical figures, abstractions or pure combinations of forms and colors. Although they are preeminently pictorial, many of these pieces also include phrases or dedications.

Beyond these trends, the painted phrase with spray or marker is constant and never loses its vigor. A basic and effective form of expression, it is very accessible, one that doesn't require technical skill and not even correct spelling. Often there are quotes, but most of the texts remain anonymous. The words, the references and the 'hand-writings' change, but painted phrases maintain their capacity for moving us, stimulating imagination, broadening the senses...

Our selection privileged expressions that are most characteristic of local culture. We searched for the features of Argentine imagery and speech. We looked for signs and traces in football (soccer), in music, in politics, in native forms of expressing love, and in a wide variety of ideas and intuitions that we could call 'thinking'.

We believe this sample is representative of what is painted in our country. It is a record of our spoken language, a linguistic archive, a collection of calligraphy, of the images, ideas and feelings that take place in our streets. It is a plural view that gathers some scattered pages of the ongoing collective book that can be read on the walls.

We hope you enjoy it.

#### LOVE

Who has never felt that heady force and the overwhelming desire to share it with others, to make it public? The shape of the heart with two names inside may be the simplest synthesis of that complex feeling.

Love is a universal experience with very particular ways, and the graffiti it inspires are the most constant, no matter the place or time. In our country that charming abstraction takes on local color in terms of endearment (Cosita linda/pretty thing, Culito/Little bum), in the use of 'vos' instead of 'tú' (Sos lo mejor que me pasó en la vida/You're the best thing that happened in my life) and in the expressions Te amo [I love you] as well as Te quiero [I want you].

A genre practiced early on in schoolrooms and on desks, love graffiti usually addresses someone in particular: it is a personal message. It may not be signed, but the name of the loved one is always present. The declaration of love often has a date, and the graffiti can last for years, even longer than the relationship. Love graffiti include promises, apologies, pain or expressions of spite, third persons, sexual wants, advice for lovers...

Aside from relationships, in love graffiti we can find the cults of family and friendship. As successors of the banners offering congratulations or love that used to cross the streets from side to side some years ago, today we find many painted messages addressed to relatives: parents that love their children, or happy birthday wishes signed by the whole family. In the graffiti between friends one can read thanks, jokes, advice... And there's a particular sub-group to honor those who have passed away.

Another kind of loving graffiti concentrates on the existential aspect of the matter. There are proposals and requests, like the recurrent motto 'Más amor por favor' (More love please), born as an artistic project in San Pablo, Brazil. Some paintings express disbelief in moments of absence, No creo en el amor (I don't believe in love)... or an unconditional faith in that power, Sólo el amor salvará al mundo (Only love will save the world). And phrases that mean to define it: Love is... There are everlasting love stories, and others that last less than a painting; all of them are as changing as the walls on which they are written.

### MUSIC

Musical graffiti are strongly linked to rock culture. Rock and graffiti have formed a classical duet since the 80s, when the return to democracy coincided with the boom of FM radios. One of the most frequent forms, born then and still in use, is to write the name of the idol or admired band with spray-paint: the street expression of the cult of rock stars. Another variant is a search for promotion by bands that are just starting out, and painting their name on walls and shop shutters is a home-made advertising campaign that also makes use of stickers, fanzines and flyers for upcoming shows fixed with wheat-paste.

Band names have always been among the most widespread graffiti. At first sight they may sound like enigmatic phrases, but many times a musical style makes it clear what they are about: ska, reggae, hardcore... Another kind of painting, instead of promoting a group or soloist, celebrates a genre, the tribe that moves with certain rhythms and sounds: *Menos mal que nos queda el metal* (Luckily we still have heavy metal). *Sexo, drogas y punk rock* (Sex and drugs and punk rock).

During the '90s, with the boom of design and access to computers, printers and the Internet, the cult of national and foreign icons as well as promotional campaigns incorporated stencils, which resulted in an increase in the presence of logos and fonts to reinforce bands' identity. Another novelty at that time was that besides the traditional graffiti of rock, heavy metal and punk, paintings about *cumbia* appeared, perhaps as an echo of the peak of *bailantas* (cumbia dancing discos) and tropical bands on TV.

Many of the musical paintings quote choruses or lines from song lyrics. They come mainly from Argentine rock: examples from folklore or tango are scarce. One can also read foreign songs, many of them in English, and some that are translated. Thus, song graffiti write down what has come through the air, over the radio, the TV, at a party, or guitarreada (fireside guitar jam and sing-along). Occasionally, a G-clef or an eighth note gives us a clue that the text has music. When reading it, one can usually recognize who plays that tune, but may not always know who wrote the lyrics, and the author becomes a little anonymous: what is sure is that someone liked it enough to go out and paint it. And the same song can appear in different neighborhoods and cities

Lastly, thanks to the impetus of street art and some official initiatives to make a place for it in public spaces, one can see big murals in tribute to popular music figures, such as Pappo, Sandro, Piazzolla, Luca Prodan, Charly García, Spinetta, Indio Solari, etc. On many corners passers-by can also find more rustic portraits of these and other idols. Fans usually add quotes or phrases of love and devotion, but in these cases the interventions are not considered vandalism: they are part of a ritual.

Beyond figures, styles or the search for fame, other kinds of musical graffiti directly celebrate the existence of music itself. Or simply, as a wall reads: La vida sin música es una mierda (Life without music is shit).

### **POLITICS**

Political graffiti has a long tradition in our country. Throughout Argentine History, struggles and social tensions have shown correlations on the walls. A famous example of graffiti was written by President Sarmiento on a stone: 'Men can be beheaded; but not ideas'; there were anarchist and socialist immigrants paintings at the outset of the 20th century; Mexican artist David Siqueiros' visit spread stencils during the 30s; workers and students painted slogans during the Cordobazo (popular revolt in Córdoba city; previous to Paris May 1968); and pro-democracy graffiti appeared in the early 80s; these constitute some of the milestones in the evolving relationship between graffiti and politics.

The act of painting in the streets (especially without permission) means a challenging attitude towards authority, a defense of free expression, a position taken regarding the use of public spaces, and it offers an economical and popular way to spread ideas that have no place in mass media. A classical graffiti reads: *The press is theirs; the walls are ours*.

It isn't strange that most paintings correspond to revolutionary ideas, although certain nationalist or ultra-religious stencils constitute an exception. Whatever hands they come from, political graffiti rarely support the *status quo*: nobody writes *in favor* of the system. Undoubtedly, the people who most often paint are those who participate in political parties, social, environmental, or anarchist organizations, groups for gender equity, etcetera. Many times, graffiti expressing positions and proposals about hot issues is simultaneous with the political agenda and parliamentary debates:

mass media law, marriage equality, legalization of abortion or drug consumption, among others.

On the walls one can find quotes, slogans and stencils of historical figures such as San Martín, Sarmiento, Juan Domingo Perón, Che Guevara, and more. And of course, contemporary politicians have their place too, often accompanied by insults, accusations or ironical darts.

Most of the graffiti we've compiled date from the last fifteen years. There are some from December 2001: one can read words born at that moment, such as 'cacerolazo' [casserole protest] or 'cartoneros' [cardboard recyclers], and phrases that were popular slogans: *Que se vayan todos* ['Out with them all!', referred to politicians].

Within political parties' paintings, Kirchner supporters have understood that graffiti are a means of communication every bit as powerful as mass media or social networks. It's not just the typical electoral painting with candidates' names and slogans on a wall whitewashed with lime, but spray-paint freehand writings. To the slogans, written in the heat of the political agenda, they've added stencils with pictures of a penguin [The Kirchners come from Patagonia] and Oesterheld's Eternauta [popular comic hero] with Néstor Kirchner's face, among other designs.

Repression is also a frequent topic in political graffiti. Some refer to the last dictatorship, as do a series of stencils with the phrase *Nunca más* [Never more], that reproduce the cover of the book with the same name. Others claim for justice and/or honor activists murdered or missing in

democracy, such as Kostecki and Santillán, Julio López or Mariano Ferreyra, to name just a few. Among different forces of repression, the police are by far the institution that receives the most paintings against it. Anti-police graffiti include different names in slang (*ratis, yuta, botón...*) and qualifiers such as murderer or bribe-taker.

In times of election campaigns a particular phenomenon occurs. Interventions on candidates posters and paintings question or ridicule campaign slogans: they are intervened with clown's noses, mustaches, they are crossed out, or some words are changed or added. Besides, an arsenal of anarchist phrases is deployed to point out distrust in voting or 'choosing' in a representative democracy. Votar no cambia nada, pintar paredes tampoco [Voting changes nothing; neither does painting walls].

### **FOOTBALL**

Football (or soccer) is the national sport and it's omnipresent in our daily lives. We live it as players or as supporters, in the stadiums, in matches among friends, or through the media, we wear it in our everyday clothes. It is an inevitable topic of conversation at work or among neighbors, the result of matches can define the mood for the whole week, as well as the possibility of teasing others or getting teased. Obviously, such passion moves onto the walls.

The most basic expression consists in painting the name, nickname, or emblem of one's club. Generally, we can recognize two kinds of paintings: in the former, the fan addresses his own team in second person (*Hoy te quiero más I* 

Today I love you more), and in the latter, he tells other people about his passion (*Con Alva soy rico gratis* / With Alva I'm rich for free).

Another example of classical football graffiti are insults to rivals, plentiful in wit and malice: trapo fácil, manda yuta ['easy rag', meaning 'it's easy to steal their flags' / 'police-caller', meaning 'cowards']. There, the difference between how a team refers to itself and how others do can be clearly seen. For instance, 'Millionaires' and 'Xeneizes', or 'Gallinas' [Chickens] and 'Bosteros' [Dung removers] for the River Plate and Boca Juniors teams, respectively.

Some clubs have fans all over the country, but local competition divides some neighborhoods or cities in two, like Avellaneda between Racing Club and Independiente, or La Plata city with Estudiantes and Gimnasia. In this selection, the most eloquent case is located in Rosario, where the rivalry between Newell's Old Boys and Rosario Central colors the streets in hot exchanges. Walls, gates, shop shutters, curbs and traffic signals are painted and re-painted in red and black, or blue and yellow. They refer to themselves as 'Leprosos' [Lepers] and 'Canallas' [Rotten], but call each other 'Pecho frío' [Cold chest] and 'Sin aliento' [No encouragement] (abbreviated, Pecho and Sina), and represent one another with a penguin and with a loudspeaker. Interactions are constant: covering over, crossing out, adding something, replying back and forth all the time

Becoming a fan of a team means belonging to a tribe, and football paintings are territorial markers, like dogs peeing [marking trees]. Around the stadiums, there are corners taken by

team colors, emblems, the jerseys of the club, fragments of songs, idols or fans remembered 'forever in the hearts of the band'... Also, there appear more elaborated murals, charged with symbols: the names or numbers that the bands choose for themselves (Player #12, the Band of the Snowed Cigar...) accompanied by marginal signs, such as five dots [representing four thieves surrounding a cop in prison], pistols, knives, the rival's coffin or gravestone, a marihuana leaf, a bottle of wine or beer, and other ingredients of the fans' aguante [support/endurance].

Above and beyond all these differences, there's the National Team. The Argentine jersey has become as representative of our Nation as the National Flag, and the players who have worn it gloriously have become heroes. Maradona has transformed 'The number 10' into 'D10S' [God], and his presence on the walls covers all formats: from spontaneous affection expressed with a marker or spray paint to delicate designs with stencils, or murals with historical postcards. Perhaps due to the fact that his career developed mainly in Spain, Lío Messi's name and image still appear timidly in our streets.

### **THINKING**

Although some idea is asserted in all graffiti, under the heading of 'thinking', we gather together those graffiti that express intuitions, reflections, doubt, epiphanies... condensed ways of perceiving, thinking or imagining the world. Sometimes, ideas are shared in phrases or in drawings, and in some cases they come up in the combination of text and image.

In their most archetypical version, thinking graffiti are offered up as philosophical or poetic maxims. One of its characteristics is the use of the verb 'to be' to introduce definitions, metaphors and comparisons ('Dreams are like Chinese shadows...'). Usually they resemble written language more than the spoken word: the use of  $t\dot{u}$  (instead of vos [you]) or verb tenses infrequent in everyday discourse (seremos / 'we shall be'), with a more 'literary' or 'cultured' vocabulary, as if graffiti had became grandiloquent. Some are exact quotes from books, songs, famous phrases, proverbs...

Thoughts can be also worded as questions, now rhetorical, now real forms of questioning to broaden the senses. Other times, sparks of humor appeal to the absurd, or challenge rationality and common sense with wild dreams or paradoxes that shake up the mind's usual habits. One can also see phrases or enigmatic figures that provoke smiles or puzzlement, perhaps inside jokes among those who painted them.

Many graffiti are presented as proposals, with imperatives that can to be more or less kind. As is the case in advertising, omnipresent in public spaces, the walls tell you what you have to do, although by way of different suggestions. Ideas about life conditions, generally with anti-capitalist messages, that urge us to adopt alternative lifestyles as regards our world vision, consumption, sexuality, etc... Besides, there exists an entire branch of counter-advertising graffiti: interventions on banners (phrases, paintings, collage) that alter messages, as well as logos or slogans remixed to generate different meanings, which is the case of many stencils.

The combination of text and image (drawings, typography, icons or emoticons) often alters the significance that the words would have separately, and produces contrasts, ironies and new meanings. Besides, there are also graphic jokes that express purely visual thoughts. And the context can also affect the meaning of the graffiti or suggest certain interpretations: like an 'A' for anarchy on the wall of a church.

Of all these topics, identity is one of the most recurrent. Who am I, who are you, who are we? There are phrases that raise uncertainty among readers, set out a categorical truth, or propose things to be a certain way. Thus, we come across different and uncertain forms of 'us', in which one may or may not be included.

Other existential questions that people often paint about are liberty, reality, life and death, the act of thinking itself, and different forms of faith, the divine and the sacred. In mystical graffiti, God and Jesus appear frequently, but there's also room for other religions and beliefs.

A particular sub-group is that of self-referential graffiti, in which the practice becomes the topic: graffiti about graffiti. These messages among colleagues refer to the act of painting, name the materials (wall, spray, paint), salute painters, and are a call to action.

A remarkable thing happens when graffiti remain unfinished or are completed later. Either because the person had to flee, or ran out of paint, or the phrase didn't fit the chosen space, we can read graffiti that are missing a word or syllable and so

invite us to complete the message. Sometimes the same people do return to finish their work, and one notices two different moments of painting; and on some occasions, other hands write what is missing or change its meaning. That's what happens with many cross-outs, amendments, substitutions or additions.

One can also find successions of phrases, written by several different people that generate little dialogues: questions and answers, explanations or comments that emerge from one initial graffiti. The participants can be distinguished by different calligraphy, techniques or colors. Beyond the tone of the exchanges, on the walls we can appreciate the curious phenomenon of communication between strangers, and the happy combinations of collective thinking.