

In the name of Miley Cyrus: Strategical coverings of Milei's name in public spaces

Lyric Essay

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Abstract:

In 2023, as a part of Milei's presidential campaign in Argentina, his name started to appear written with markers all over public spaces in Buenos Aires. At the same time, the name of Miley Cyrus also began to appear. Detractors of the far right's candidate were turning the 'i' in Milei into a 'y'. A language act of resistance in written form was created. An invocation of a pop icon that profited from the well-known name of the artist. 'Milei' is subversively appropriated through word play and street intervention. The city became a canvas of social conflict.

Keywords: art; pop; fandom; hacktivism; deconstruction.

Miley over Milei

In 2023, the political campaign that led Javier Milei into the presidency of Argentina presented the people with a series of novel strategies that included grassroots actions and a heavy use of social media platforms, especially Twitter. Milei proposed an unforeseen sharp turn to the right that radically shifted the country's political landscape. His discourse was plagued by numerous regressive claims regarding human rights. He became popular for his hate speech and homophobic remarks. Milei's approach to public policy questions Argentine sovereignty over the Falkland Islands, denies the disappearances enforced during the last dictatorship, openly supports genocidal Israel, expresses admiration for Donald Trump, and is currently trying to dismantle public health and public education (opposing, in particular, university gratuity). Notably relevant to this article, another of his government's policies consists of an ongoing attack on culture (notoriously epitomised in a cartoonish hatred of national cinema). The bleak scenarios Argentina was facing as part of a global trend, brought to public attention the widespread support of such reactionary notions.

Either as a part or as a side effect of Milei's campaign leading to the 2023 election, his name started to appear written with markers all over public spaces in Buenos Aires. The seemingly improvised and accessible character of this form of expression made the political support for the far right appear popular, youthful, passionate, and spontaneous. At the same time, the name of Miley Cyrus also began to appear ubiquitously scrawled with markers. Detractors of the far right's candidate were turning the 'i' in Milei into a 'y' and adding the surname Cyrus to make it an unrelated expression of fandom. Unsuspecting passersby might have thought that a certain US singer was becoming increasingly fashionable. Between Milei and Miley, there is but i/y of difference. In Spanish, both letters are generally pronounced the same, and, in utterance of their names, they both need a second word to be distinguishable from one another, either 'i latina' or 'y griega'. Without prior knowledge of whom those names reference, based on Spanish phonetics, a clarification would be needed to know which i/y to use. There is a founding confusion which enables the political action that concerns this article.

The Miley scrawls are a use case. A use case of agency, of urbanity, of art, of the possibility of the written word in a current and contingent context. A

demurral, ephemeral because it is material; an erasure meant to be erased. A localised displacement of electoral propaganda that makes do with what there is and intervenes it to confuse reading perception. A political stance which is not an opposition, but a refusal to contest democracy on its own terms. This commentary understands that there is no gap which is not an underlying condition. Drawing from Henri Lefebvre's and Jacques Derrida's notions on the relationality of space and language signs, and their links to presence; and Jacques Rancière's approach to dissent as that which makes certain utterances possible, small inscriptions are brought to the fore. These three thinkers contribute to form an abstract spatial canvas of interweaving lines of flight and force which shape the very founding provisions of expression, where the distance between the threads of the urban fabric is telling of their placement and trajectory. The accessibility, subtlety, and ease of iterability of the street articulations studied here, rejects the burdensome utilitarian impositions weighing on political art. From the tip of brash markers, Miley acquires a becoming in which anarchism turns soft power into a playful signature gesturing to its own hard methods.

For a moment, in 2023, writing Miley Cyrus on street signs, city walls, and bathroom stalls; quickly, and fleetingly, became a form of expression of political opposition. In a city visually besieged by propaganda, a cheap marker can be an apt blade to cut rifts in the optic images of oppression. Milei is written into Miley. As if the pop singer could shield people's eyes from electoral support of a proposed erosion of fundamental rights. As an action of street intervention, the name change highlights the importance of cultural resistance in urban spaces. Meaning is contested, for it can never be fixed. What is seen becomes dependent on the beholder's gaze. This article is divided into three sections: first, a conceptualization of urban space according to the configurations of its discourse; second, a reflection on the affective applications of pop iconography; and third, a spectral analysis of the scopes of deconstruction, culture jamming, and hacktivism manifested in this case. Buenos Aires offers mixed signals and strong sentiments to those who wander and linger.

Your signs dream of crosses¹

As any other city, Buenos Aires's space is constructed to correspond with a series of ideological patterns which coalesce the community that makes use of a line from the tango "Tristezas de la calle Corrientes", lyrics by

¹ This subtitle is a translation of "Tus letreros sueñan cruces", a line from the tango "Tristezas de la calle Corrientes", lyrics by Homero Expósito.

them. The cultural usage of the cityscape implies transformation and involves a certain aesthetic disposition (Torrijos, 1988, pp. 17-18). This results in a mode of participation in which every actor is a co-creator, and where reciprocity should be highlighted (Lefebvre, 1972, p. 92; Torrijos, 1988, p. 32). Because urban space is lived together, it involves manifold social relations; its polysemy allows for a vast profusion of interweaving variety. Aesthetically, an emphasis is placed on the visual aspects of circuits which are commodified and whose contents cannot become intelligible by the simplifying polar fictions of transparency and opacity (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 75; 81; 83; 85-87; 92). According to Henri Lefebvre, the urban is a socially practiced morphology that is mainly characterised by simultaneity. The city's form is a social and perceptible signifying assemblage that enfolds meanings which appear and resound in its paths, projected in ways that tamper with the senses of closeness and extension. It presents admixture upon its plane in a manner that veils conflicts and refracts them as a style, each object duplicated into an image (Lefebvre, 1972, pp. 69-71; 96). In such a context, the increasingly unrelenting prevalence of propaganda renders political interventions a preferential tool to forwardly seek to shape the urban landscape. Signs dream and citizens might, in passing, offer them a caress made of ink. People read and write on city walls; and if it is true that walls have ears, it should not be discarded that they can also irradiate enlightenment.

For Jacques Rancière, the specificity of political dissent is the ephemeral form of partaking assumed by its relationships. Political action defies the blindness of those who do not see that which is excluded from sight, transforming its surroundings by making visible a gap in perception. A political act is one that exhibits a possibility; where space becomes the stage for an appearance that marks an internal difference capable of modifying what can be done, seen, and named within certain boundaries (Rancière, 2010, pp. 27; 37-39; 133). A shift in the aesthetic metapolitics which frame the possibilities of art must be enacted. A form of intervention through which the city is evidenced as an open site of social conflicts. If state power is sustained by polarising myths that place otherness at the margins, then those who are situated on the fringes must tactically utilise their imagery to inscribe their own cultural radiations into prohibitive spaces (Cf. Bartra, 2007, pp. 17-18; 37). An appropriation of the means of the other places a challenge to arbitrary allocations by the very act which dares to evidence that a factitious allotment has parcelled out common space.

Although political street art is necessarily site-

specific, certain stylistic traits recur across diverse locations. Julia Tulke has studied interventions of this sort in Istanbul and Athens, linking them to a Lefebvrian urban space where decentralised participatory encounters strategically register a spectrum of thinking (Tulke, 2019, pp. 122-124). Tulke places great importance on the digital socialisation and preservation of these actions, seeing it as an immaterial collective memory that resists the erasure of censorship and enables an archive ready for conjuring. These interpretations differ substantially from the ones expressed in this article, which treats erasure as potency. The Milei / Miley iterations passed largely undocumented. Here, the ephemeral quality of the writings is praised as an attribute resisting dominant impositions of transcendence; and the focus, set on a materiality that cannot be deferred, regards the digital as a source of hacking know-how to be borrowed for extrapolation. Memory is not tied to an archived productive output, rather, it is unleashed through blurry recollections towards undetermined speculative exercises.

To communicate something in public space, the message must conform to the presentation, articulation, and behaviours such as sphere prescribes. When considering advertising campaigns in urban contexts, the salient aspect is that it seems all available room has been assigned and that any other form of written expression is devalued and regarded as vandalism. What is more, even transgressive information is expected to replicate the forms of official advertisements if it is meant to be decoded by the general public. It is, therefore, evident that struggle over discourse always implies an aesthetic struggle (Schneider and Friesinger, 2010, pp. 15; 27-28). To Lefebvre the term 'discourse' refers to the commodification of language. This is the form of allowed messages in public spaces, which impose social patterns that tend to regulatory perpetuation. Discourse plagues language and failure to comply results in the inability to make oneself understood, the formulation of certain things must remain inarticulable (Lefebvre, 1966, pp. 371-372). At a time when policing and ubiquitous surveillance deters citizens from manners of expression that stray from normative sanctions (Northoff, 2010, p. 143; Cf. Schneider and Friesinger, 2010, p. 25), sense disputes necessitate destabilising assertions that favour questions and foster disloyalty to any fixed value. Because both the president's endorsement and its subversion were unofficial manifestations, they both enact a certain disruption of regulated perception. Yet there is a paradox in the expression of state support by such vandalistic scribble. Does it seek to expropriate the means of dissent, or does it intend to showcase the margins' reinforcement of state legitimacy?

According to political scientist Dolores Rocca Rivarola, Argentina exhibits a general tendency towards personalist political campaigns; but the right, in particular, aims to portray its support as an unmediated and spontaneous backing from the unaffiliated, non-partisan common folk (Rocca Rivarola, 2024, pp. 337; 339; 347). This latter trait has also been identified in right-wing movements internationally. Examples from England and Japan showcase heterogeneous supporters who identify as unaffiliated, ordinary 'patriots' partaking in a 'grassroots revolution' and taking to the streets to make an emotional appeal to passersby (Busher, 2016, pp. 171-175; Hall, 2021, pp. 44; 159; 178; 202). Street interventions centred on Milei's name either were, or appeared to be, part of these broader trends of spontaneous grassroots tactics. But if official discourse seeks to profit from unofficial tools, then approved discourses must be made to turn against themselves. Once again officialism calls to be contested in its own terms. So, how can Miley Cyrus, once a Disney product, become a poster girl against the rise of the capitalist right?

Paint to match the roses

All spaces conjure imaginaries, that is, understandings comprised of material configurations and narratives that shape them and endow them with a particular emotional quality. Because each individual mentally maps the city using a combination of landmarks related to needs of orientation and subjective bias, imaginaries carry a dimension that is deeply personal. Yet these imaginaries are also shared and shaped collectively through conversational exchanges, written descriptions, and representations in numerous arts. A cultural process mediates the formation of what becomes the city, a common imaginary under continuous change (Saitta, 2010, p. 51). Cities are plagued by representational spaces modified for ritual requirements. Be they religious or political, spaces of this kind present a sanctified inwardness and a repressive immanence. The symbols which adorn them thrive on a certain confusion between the sensory, the sensual, and the sexual (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 48-49). Surely, Miley can be regarded as a sex symbol, while Milei can be construed as repressive political figure. Overwritten, Miley Cyrus, thus, emerges as a frictional signifier, a star ready to collide with a system.

The visual rumour of Miley Cyrus's name circulates the city: bouncing on the walls, causing multiple reflections, reverberating in the urban space. Lefebvre notes that orientation is a sense, a

perception, a movement, a direction (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 423). Miley cannot be apprehended as a one-dimensional construct, the appropriation of her name for a political cause declares a contradiction. The kind of contradiction necessary to formulate dissent. Regulations are enacted to provide a certain degree of stability (Gadringer, 2010, p. 36), but space allotment is always provisional (Rambatan, 2010, p. 48). If popular culture is defined in opposition to power (Cf. Hall, 1981, p. 238), then popular celebrity culture can also be constituted as a site of resistance in the aesthetic economy of public space. Miley Cyrus simultaneously offers the image of a star purveyed by a corporation and a controlled dose of marketable transgression, following her rebranding a decade prior to these interventions. In this respect, she could be perceived as a far more innocuous version of the campaign that led Milei into power, which portrayed him as a 'State rebel' at the service of free capitalism. This ironic mirroring of product placement could be read as a way to expose the politician's role as a puppet for market interests. But although Miley and Milei might have been sold similarly, the radical difference between the two cannot be understated. One is an artist in the entertainment industry, and the other is a politician attempting to dismantle public institutions and desecrate acquired human rights. That is the opposition which allows the former to be erected as a bastion against the oppressive agenda of the latter.

Argentina has a tradition of canonising singers, in a manner akin to popular saints, to channel transformative intentions. Perhaps, the most emblematic case of such a process is that of cumbia singer Gilda, whose ceremonial admiration encompasses a series of spontaneously organised practices associated with her spiritual powers after death. Recurring votive actions performed for Gilda include giving offerings, writing letters, gathering at her gravesite in Buenos Aires on the weekends, and making trips to her sanctuary in Entre Ríos. Sociologist Eloísa Martín describes how fans actively partake in the construction of Gilda's persona and her inscription on the realm of that which is sacred. In her affinity to sacred perceptions, Gilda acquires a certain differential quality that is socially recognised and performed at specific moments in specific spaces. Fandom is a becoming, a process of successive choices through which the idol starts to gain increasing presence in daily life. Gilda's differential sacredness is strengthened by communal practical understandings that bring forth an affective attachment to artistic admiration (Martín, 2007, pp. 31; 33; 37-39; 44-45; 49). As it transpires, these regional fandom practices can aid in interpreting the temporary tactical association of Miley's name to modes of affective holiness.

Celebrity culture expresses a form of consumption in which fans become active parties in production in order to further the proximity with their idol through collective affective investments of symbolic value (Derbaix and Korchia, 2019, pp. 110-112; 115; 117). David Morgan explains that “religion can be understood as a system of technologies for the body’s interface with complex networks that join human and non-human actors in practices of exchange and interaction” (Morgan, 2016, p. 277). He adds that these technologies function as delegates, setting socially arranged matrices of interaction and redefining body continuity by projecting the self onto the surroundings (*Ibid.*). Following this conception of devotional endeavours, a makeshift folk invocation of a pop icon can be a bridge between grassroots manifestations and ideological phantoms.

The title of this section is extracted from the lyrics of the song ‘Flowers’ by Miley Cyrus, released in 2023 just some months prior to the street interventions analysed in this paper. The song proposes an ethical response to Bruno Mars’s 2013 hit ‘When I was your man’. Distancing herself from the pervasive discourse of romantic dependency, Cyrus asserts her own individual self-sufficiency. Despite engaging in an artistic dialogue with a previous song, as musicians often do, ‘Flowers’ was struck with a copyright claim brought forward by partial shareholders of ‘When I was your man’. The claim by the plaintiff that ‘Flowers’ replicates ‘numerous melodic, harmonic and lyrical elements’ is not sufficient from a musical standpoint to sustain a copyright litigation, as Cyrus’s song offers enough musical variation. Reuters reported that Cyrus’s team contested the standing of the plaintiffs to bring the lawsuit. If that has been the only argument raised so far, it is not surprising that the judge allowed the case to proceed (Brittain, 2025). Although U.S. copyright law is vague enough to favour corporate litigiousness, it is reasonable to believe that musical arguments will prevail in court. It will be up to her lawyers to demonstrate that the similarities operate as a reference and do not constitute a derivative work. The case provides a telling exemplification of current appraisals of authorship. In the gardens of the city, Miley’s roses still smell as sweet, regardless of the name in the card.

The reason why Miley Cyrus performs so aptly as a contentious political aesthetic entity is because it does not futilely attempt to resolve its inherent contradiction, rather it thrives by manipulating its paradoxical richness and bringing forth the complex links between its clashing terms. Exposing the connections between pop music and neofascist trends, raises issue with what is purported as natural and destabilises the façade that veils

ideology to perpetuate it. The mere suggestion of the ties of representation that bind the system is enough to activate an inquest into its insidiousness (Monroe, 2005, pp. 126-127; 129). One of the most prevalent traps of activism in the global South is a quaint idealization of locality which romanticises tendentious constructions of identity. That is not to say that regional specificity should not be defended, rather, territorial forms of articulation should always be conscious of their place in the current international geopolitical agenda. Intervening public space must be oriented to favour possibilities for further intervention (cf. Schneider and Friesinger, 2010, pp. 30; 32). Perhaps the choice of a singer from the United States might be hinting at the way Milei reveres U.S. imperialistic interests.

According to writer Thomas O. St-Pierre, Miley Cyrus is an iconic figure representing youths born in the beginning of the twenty-first century. Coincidentally, or not, those same youths have been blamed for tilting the scale to secure the far right’s ascent to power. St-Pierre reprises the much exploited debate surrounding Miley’s rebranding from innocent child star to sexualised pop icon, to note that the 2013 controversy was just another expression of the ever-recurring conflict which could be labelled as ‘inter-generational intransigence’. It is noted that in these periodical rifts, youth always appears to infringe moral boundaries (St-Pierre, 2018, pp. 15; 20-21). Another of the inherent contradictions the superimposed name of Miley brings to the fore is the question as to whether, in this case, those moral concerns arose from the alleged sexual liberation of the pansexual singer or the regressive resurgence of fascism. Even if the apparent political incorrectness of the right could never be revolutionary, inasmuch as it legitimises oppression, that does not mean its ‘oppositional appeal’ cannot be marketed. Maybe Miley is a tongue in cheek retort to a president that is a caricature straight from the manosphere. Another aspect to consider is that if Miley’s main controversy concerns her sexuality, it is because, as an adult, she still has to grapple with the image of innocence imposed upon her as a child star. The ageism implied in inter-generational conflicts, is reinterpreted in relation to concerns about the lack of maturity to deal with mature topics (St-Pierre, 2018, pp. 29; 58). Whatever the case, there is an undeniable polysemy to Miley Cyrus as a figure of speech.

At this point, it is relevant to reference Marco Deseriis’s analysis of the symbolic power of Donald Trump’s name. In it, the author provides a historic-philosophical approach to proper names and starts by reflecting on the sonic associations of the utterance of the politician’s name (Deseriis, 2017, p. 4). Destiny Hope Cyrus legally changed her name to

Miley Ray Cyrus in 2008, inspired by her childhood nickname: Smiley (Oliver, 2011, p. 171). Miley's name is derived from a sonic association to a familial term of endearment. In this light, although it may seem a little far-fetched, it is tempting to extrapolate Deseriis's method. It is curious that Milei sounds like 'mi ley' (my law, in Spanish). It would be too speculative to wonder whether such a homophony played a role in the president's public image, but it is worth mentioning it. Deseriis also ponders on how taking over the name of a public figure might be used as a tactic to confront discursive authority and privilege. He describes Trump's name as 'the strident sound of the exertion of force (tr-) and the muffled sound of its absorption (-ump)', but explains that its sound symbolism could be subverted to 'evoke an engine start failure (ump-tr-ump-tr-ump)' (Deseriis, 2017, p. 13). By this form of word play, Milei could represent the internalization (mi-) of an imposition (-ley); or it could be read as a semantic drift to tamper with its alleged authority. Deseriis notes that proper names have a 'purely indexical function' which is not reliant on the referent. Able to be associated to as many objects as convention allows, proper names foster ambiguities (Deseriis, 2017, pp. 13-14). A name becomes itself by frequency (Georgelou and Janša, 2017, p. 2). Miley Cyrus can be an expression of resistance to a name with a similar spelling because of the high symbolic power of her standing. The effectiveness of invoking her intercession is dependent on her social recognition as a pop star.

In 2021, Miley Cyrus succeeded in registering her name as a trademark in the European Union (Case T-368/20), solidifying the status of her name as a brand with conceptual meaning linked to her fame. The General Court understood that "the word-sign 'MILEY CYRUS' has a specific semantic content for the relevant public given that it refers to a public figure of international reputation, known by most well-informed, reasonably observant and circumspect persons". The case considered the possible confusion between Miley Cyrus's brand and a previously existing trademark called Cyrus. The ruling set a precedent because it acknowledged that the public can 'neutralize any visual and phonetic similarities' when met with a mark of such relevance (Antoniou, 2021). The concession of Miley's claim lends legal support to the assertion made in this paper, that Miley Cyrus's name holds enough popularity as to overpower the underlying name in the attention of people who read it in public spaces.

Names enact cultural codes (Georgelou and Janša, 2017, p. 2), but they also shape reality. Because names are indexical, they do not necessarily aim at identification, they can express an assertion of will. Names evoke when something is made to appear,

and they invoke when effects are manifested (cf. Crowley, n. d., pp. 166; 190; 193). Ritual participation is paramount because it exacerbates perceptions and intensifies affective responses, experiences become internal, sensorial impressions turn intimate, and orientation is directed by a mythical commonality (Cf. Tambiah, 2007, pp. 106; 108). Miley covers Milei to uncover a mechanism, adding ink to smudge the definition of the written word, creating a disorienting double vision. Characters may conjure up a wraith, an apparition of a dubious duplicitous presence, an announcement of an uncertain death. "An unconscionable time a-dying—there is the picture ('I am afraid, gentlemen,')" (Stevenson, 1925, p. 229). When a name is traced, its letters may tether a presence to a space where it would otherwise not be.

The haunting art of vandalism

A common trope in fantasy is the appearance of writings of unknown origin on walls, these inscriptions are often attributed to ghosts, phantoms that manifest a paradoxical coexistence of presence and absence, of that which is seen and that which is not immediately apparent. Milei is occluded by Miley, and Miley is cast, it is spelled, to bring to attention something that was hidden from view. An illustrious name sparks an impression to ward off a threat, to prevent something from returning. Milei is no longer readable, but it remains somewhat identifiable. After the overlay is set, the basal tracing stubbornly iterates producing a condemnably recurring exappropriation. Specters announce a coming, a return or a coming yet to come, but a coming that is forever untimely. The fringes of the letters become hard to discern and insistence on death breeds suspicion. Specters are visions that flicker in the urban dreamscape projected upon unsuspecting surfaces, markers can make a canvas out of almost anything. Spirits are mediators, but iteration may turn them into ghosts. Ghosts are there even when they are not (cf. Derrida, 1993, pp. 25, 159-160; 165; 200; 279). But nothing holds the power to haunt if individuals do not, in fear, grant it capability with each genuflection, with each curtsy (cf. Stirner, 2007, p. 77). Spectres are linked to fear because one ought to remain vigilant. Street signs seem to scream: 'move along, there's nothing to see here'; but observant citizens know better. If you stare at them long enough, they look back; it's uncanny.

Henri Lefebvre proposes a spectral analysis of the city in terms of a study of its scope, its magnitude, its energy, its intensity, its systemic behaviour. His

approach interprets the polysemy of spectres in a different direction. Urbanity is perceived as a virtual reconstitution, the spectre of the city is a practice which encompasses cohesively all composing elements, yet, simultaneously, it projects the fragmentation between said elements. Participation is an obsession that veils a constitutively conflicting content (Lefebvre, 1972, pp. 102-106). For Derrida, spectres relay the frequency of the visibility of that which cannot be seen; what recurs, frequents (Derrida, 1993, pp. 165-166). Music, like Miley's, can also be more deeply analysed by observing its spectral frequency. Lefebvre thinks the city as a creation that appropriates multiplicity and transfigures it. Art is a reflection which restores sense. Urban fulfilment comes in a shape which exalts usage and congregation; it is perceptive and practical. Segregation is a question of political marginalization and class (Lefebvre, 1972, pp. 119; 121). Walls stage separation where continuity is denied, they are performative boundaries (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 87). But ghosts can easily go through walls. Artivism is a form of speculative spectacularisation. Cities can be hauntingly beautiful; they are layered constructs built on vestiges. Cities are sites of struggle where state propaganda lurks, offering lustrous treats to unsuspecting strangers too concerned with their own immediate survival. Milei's written name appears refreshingly haphazard. The president's unofficial campaign included a number of grassroots tactics oriented towards state power acquisition. An active effort was put into promoting forms of inconspicuous political preaching (*bajadas de línea*).² The city is haunted, but it won't align. The political spectrum is wide.

Reading sets in motion a situated and contextual decryption of symbols written in a specific order. When codes are executed, they expand to generate readings as numerous as the acts of reading applied (Cf. Ohler, 2010, pp. 189; 202). According to Alexei Monroe, systemic order relies on the concealment of source codes and the deletion of any data that might conflict with current program imperatives. Hacking prompts destabilising altered effects by reintroducing information that should have been erased and pairing it with added contradictory elements (Monroe, 2005, p. 130). The image of the letters which form Miley Cyrus concatenate in a name, but Milei remains in a form of recursion. The repetition implied by this mode of inclusion extends the sequence by way of a sort of communicational reflexivity (cf. Yelle, 2016, p. 213). The relational function of language stresses the relative value of signs; formal integrity can only be attained by the articulation of discontinuous parts. And so it is,

language is cumulative. Forms attempt to reduce that which is irreducible, failing upon imposition to absorb the formless (Lefebvre, 1966, pp. 311-314; 319).

Deconstruction operates from within, borrowing the resources for subversion from the structure it seeks to destabilise. Articulation permits graphic chains where otherness is occluded by the inscriptions it enables. The trace is that conditional difference in perpetual movement which allows the articulation of time and space in experience (Derrida, 1974, pp. 39; 69; 92; 96). Words are determined by their place in a sequence because the gaps in the joints make meaning possible (Hillis Miller, 2011a, pp. 42-43; Hillis Miller, 2011b, p. 44; Hillis Miller, 2011c, p. 50). To confirm that meaning is defined by concatenation, one could say that Trace is also Miley Cyrus' oldest brother, the one whose personality is most like hers (Oliver, 2011, pp. 219-221). But not only inscription should be regarded, for erasure can constitute an optimal tool of political resistance. Strikethrough (*sous-rature*) effaces while allowing legibility, it masks to unveil (Cf. Derrida, 1974, pp. 38; 90). Milei must remain in order to be vanquished; its letters linger under fresher ink. The 'y' that modifies the 'i' marks the spot, the site of a proverbial semiotic treasure. Milei is not just crossed out; it is appropriated against itself. In a gesture reminiscent of the three arrows symbol that is used to cover swastikas, a name with a similar lettering can become an expression of resistance to far right propaganda.

The simultaneity of absence and presence is embodied in the sign as a mediator, in so far as it operates by an erotics of distance that concurrently promises a penetration into meaning and a deferral of contact (Yelle, 2016, p. 215). But absence and presence are not two additive terms, they transcend such simplifying categorical oppositions. Signs illusory name what escapes denomination, and by that act widen the distance. That which creates both ghosts and symbols, retains a certain magic that becomes its most powerful force, and, by its play, space is shaped by the oscillation between absences and presences (Lefebvre, 1980, pp. 225; 230; 240; 244). It cannot be a coincidence that one of the most popular phrases in t-shirts and flags dedicated to Gilda by her fans read: '*Tu muerte no es ausencia, sino un cambio de presencia*' ('Your death is not absence, but a change of presence') (Martín, 2007, p. 47).

The markings that spell the names of the president and the pop star are unsigned. A city of the magnitude of Buenos Aires presents a prime opportunity for creators to remain anonymous (Cf. Gadringer, 2010, pp. 40-41). A political declaration is painted onto the

² "*Bajada de línea*" is a vernacular expression used in Argentina to refer to the act of trying to push a certain political view onto someone.

cityscape whilst the hand that activated the trace is occluded. The graffiti's conditions of possibility fade from view, overshadowed by the words. Anonymity prevents recognition, both admiring and repressive. The value of an action should not be conditioned by authorship. Anonymity depersonalises actions allowing them to blossom into plural causes; since they do not belong to an individualizable will, they can be done in the name of whoever shares their sentiment. Direct actions lust for replication, and one must remember that all means can be weaponised without hierarchy (Anonymous, n. d., pp. 16; 20; 21). Markers are made of plastic, just as the 3D-printed drone frames and speed loaders can be. Distributed agency thrives in the vindication of material resistance. Milei and Miley sign but they are not personally behind the actions, the names exceed their referents.

Marco Deseriis defines improper names as those open to unforeseen appropriations. Proper names of high symbolic power, such as Miley Cyrus, are particularly prone to become improper because of the level of overlapping ambiguities they harbour. Separated from its authorial context, like a signifier disjointed from its referent, these names can become apt 'ready-made signatures'. Through articulation, improper names perform 'collective assemblages of enunciation', they hinge individual actions with impersonal tactics, punctual iterations with organised strategies. Deseriis borrows the image of Maurice Blanchot's unavowable community to describe the elusive plurality that extends behind the use of improper names and explain how that elusiveness of the referent fosters participation (Deseriis, 2015, pp. 7-8; 15-16; 24-26; 221-222; 2017, pp. 13-14). When a name is borrowed for a common cause, as is the case of Miley in graffiti, it can become improper. The street intervention is done in a name capacious enough to contain multitudes (or perhaps not). The uncertainty of numbers gives the act broader imaginary power. Is it just one person roaming the city with a marker, or are there as many actors as there are inscriptions?

In his reflection on Miley Cyrus, Thomas O. St-Pierre proposes a user's guide to being indignant on social networks. He outlines a series of actions, three of which are worth mentioning. The first one specifically concerns political elections, which he describes as 'a great opportunity to take to the virtual streets'. St-Pierre highlights the hypocrisy of general voting campaigns and the moral high ground often assumed by voters. Secondly, he points to the satirical response on social media to those whose views are opposed to one's own, as to elicit a competitive ironical outrage in the comment section. Finally, the author recommends the approach to all

phenomena with irony, especially political signifiers capable of obtaining affective responses. He explains that relativism can be a great way to stage one's own prejudice by way of an essay on a pop singer lucidly 'sprinkled' with self-deprecating gibes (St-Pierre, 2018, pp. 71; 73; 75-76). Evidently, St-Pierre's final instruction is written about himself. However, the resemblance is striking; as is the call for irony in responding to antagonistic political campaigns.

Subversive messages can be spread by appropriating the means of mainstream media. Culture jamming, or *détournement*, is effective in communicating with wide audiences because consumers are already familiar with their ways of conveying. Well-known means of communication rest on a cemented approachability which the public perceives as reliable, therefore, they are ideal vehicles to smuggle disruptive information. Culture jamming is 'an act of semiotic sabotage' that profits from its audience's fluency in the language of popular symbols (Malitz, 2012, pp. 28; 30). Signs are treated as tools without any inherent truth to them, they are instrumentalised against the system that breeds them and readily discarded after use (Spivak, 1997, pp. xviii-xix). That is how the Miley writings manage to divert public attention from the political endorsement to the functioning of propaganda. 'Milei' is subversively appropriated as a tool used against the machinery of which it is a functional part. But, if that fails, Miley Cyrus's name holds enough weight to conjure in the public's imagination a meaning sufficiently unrelated to Argentine politics.

At this point, it seems propitious to review some general aspects that give verbal graffiti its specificity, as noted by Thomas Northoff. Hand-written street interventions are etched into public space by private actions; but they do not function as individual pieces, they are inscribed as parts of 'a process of attached artifacts'. City walls become ductile under the markers' tips, allowing the expression of a wide range of views in an equitable canvas. Graffiti can be a means to communicate a person's feelings, or it can aim at eliciting a broader response. Urban spaces can often turn into a social platform for inter-group dialogue, reflecting collective sentiments, tendencies, aspirations, and orientational directions. Sometimes, words are struck through, evidencing conflicts and a certain disposition for confrontation (Northoff, 2010, pp. 132; 136-137; 143; 145). The city accommodates a copious diversity of groups in continuous interaction. Because of this, its aesthetic makeup is relational, that is to say, perception of graffiti is communicational, concomitant, contextual, and transitory. Street art can be a tool for subaltern groups to access expression in spaces of privilege (Torrijos, 1988, pp. 27; 29; 31-34; 39). All of these traits are exhibited in the Miley Cyrus markings, as

they can be understood as a collaborative piece of dialogic confrontation.

Additionally, every use of space requires an orientation, a capacity to decode the messages embedded in the environment. Such orientation stems from a combination of varying coordinates, a sum of different itineraries from multiple perspectives at different moments; and it develops into an encompassing perception of the city which, in turn, forms the citizens. The city's internal abundance holds such disparity that it fosters continuous contradictions, setting up the optimal layout for an interactive playground (Torrijos, 1988, pp. 20-21; 29; 62; 76). The irreverent resort to Miley Cyrus against the self-consciousness of the right, invites its interpretation through the lens of play. The apparent frivolity of the act affronts the affected seriousness of electoral politics. Play does not concern itself with utility (Bataille, 2008, pp. 194-195; 203). Unlike institutionalised political art, which is ruled by efficiency (cf. Rancière, 2010, p. 134), the Miley inscription does not harangue citizens to vote responsibly; it creates a light-hearted distraction. One name does not merely replace another, sustaining an akin usage value; Miley challenges the unquestioned utility of political signs. Vandalism in a monitored space entails a certain risk. Both signings take it, but Milei's creators hope for results and security, where Miley's writers squander their ink with no campaign. The players are aware of the game, wherein the sacred is displaced; their play is rooted in aesthetics, and thus it can rise to the heights of beauty (Bataille, 2008, pp. 189-190). Language is itself a game of referrals, where the lack of a grounding non-significance, the absence of a transcendental signified, renders play limitlessness. Writing becomes an opportunity for repeated *jouissance* (Derrida, 1974, pp. 16; 70; 73; 440).

Plays are also representations. Milei and Miley can be identified with the two types of public figures that Derrida retrieves from Rousseau: the preacher and the actor. The preacher (the politician) is recognised by the coincidence between the representative and the represented. He speaks in his own name while, supposedly, carrying out his duty as a man of State. Conversely, the actor stems from the fragmentation between the representative and the represented. And what a better way to explain it than the rift between Miley Cyrus and Hannah Montana? Miley is not Hannah Montana but in the lending of her voice. Actors display feelings which are not their own, they speak what they are made to say. Miley may sing lyrics written by others or she may lend her name to a political cause she is likely to ignore completely (cf. Derrida, 1974, pp. 430-431). The State rejects multiplying difference, it denies the exchange of absences and presences, it prevents risk and chance,

it represses the death drive. It is the compromise that repudiates sacrifice, expenditure, and play (Derrida, 1974, pp. 432-433). It is the distance between a political party and a party (maybe even a 'Party in the USA'). A political speech as opposed to pop music. To undermine the solemnity of imposition, joy must be reappropriated.

All languages are as suitable for truth as they are for lies (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 81). Systems are networks which transmit coded messages that can be studied by regarding with suspicion the code's tripartition in continuity, discontinuity (opposition), and contiguity. Assessments necessarily oscillate and result in ambiguous considerations that reinforce the very ambiguity detected. Stressing such estrangement offers much potential, allowing for the denouncement of manipulations as readily as it encourages wilful tampering (Lefebvre, 1966, pp. 155-156; 168-169; 268). Cities are systems too and, therefore, they are open to hackers (Saitta, 2010, p. 49). Hackers, urban or otherwise, may be considered players who revel in combinatorics, searching for unexplored and unexpected combinations and permutations. They use their knowledge of the system to experiment with applications that go beyond intended use (Zinsmeister, 2010, pp. 148; 154; 159). Graffiti remains ephemeral while embedded in the city. The seemingly spontaneous character of the Milei / Miley marking makes it impossible to determine whether they were planted or if these doodles were, in fact, undesigned manifestations of political will. Text graffiti can function as identification for like-minded passersby, but it can also elicit responses which acknowledge their threat by distorting them (Northoff, 2010, p. 136).

'Urban hacking is a social praxis' grouped by strategical 'delegitimization', write Frank Apunkt Schneider and Gunther Friesinger (2010, pp. 18-19). Its practitioners are unconcerned with uniting in a consolidated opposition, for they are aware of how seamlessly mainstream culture can reterritorialize diversity. They acknowledge the similarity of all contemporary publics regardless of their political stance, as well as the risk of any insurgent plurality to be assimilated. Urban hackers damage the surface of their medium to release the hidden forces of its operations. Graffiti treats the cityscape as open source, enacting a temporary aesthetic function against cultural determinism. Each coding overwrites another. The generative output of urban hacking is dissent. It is a joyful form of materially situated direct action. Hacking is an articulation of antagonism unconcerned with institutionalised negotiations, social consent, or dialogues that seek to exhaust it. It does not promise a better alternative, it attempts to escape the oppressive condition of participation through critique (Schneider and Friesinger, 2010, pp.

19-20; 23-28). That is why Miley is not a call to vote for another candidate, it is not a call to vote at all; it is a commentary on the genre of political propaganda. Miley is a reappropriation of public space by those alienated by electoral politics. Culture jamming is an exercise in Rancièrian dissent, insofar as it etches an opening to demonstrate a covert functioning. Permeated by pop music, the borders of the state fail to contain politics as a separated sphere. The dividing wall, now vandalised, is evidenced as an operational fragmentation whose exposure brings to utterance previously barred possibilities. In Lefebvrian terms, the participatory interactions that come to form this space, grant a glimpse into that which discourse had rendered unutterable. Such discursive deviations are Derridean iterations, transcending categorical oppositions to signal towards prospects which cannot fully be pinned down.

Culture jamming creates a certain distance from the familiarity of mediated mainstream discourse. Hackers search for gaps in the security that binds the code to expose it. They apply their knowledge of the system to introduce subtle modifications capable of causing significant interferences and even instigate chaos. Hacking is an experimental practice that pushes social and personal limits to provide a platform for what is not immediately apparent. The accuracy of these tactics of dismantlement and reassemblage is always uncertain in advance. Hackers create disorientation by way of their insightful orientation (Gadringer, 2010, pp. 35-36; 38-40). Proper functioning of a system relies on the security of source codes and the eradication of noise, either by silence or masking. When codes are exposed systems cannot maintain efficiency. Hackers must find weak spots and reverse all safeguards of integrity to cause disruption. Corporate technologies are regularly subverted because 'the street finds a use for things' (Monroe, 2005, pp. 123-124; 135). Ideological resistance is spatialised. Urban hacking tampers with space to expose its codes (Rambatan, 2010, p. 47). Lefebvre advises his readers to stay superficial and relay what happens in the medium; one must be wary of the abyssal as much as of the celestial, he writes (Lefebvre, 1966, p. 375). What a way to justify the political relevance of scribbling a Miley Cyrus on a city wall. When a marker scratches a public surface, something emerges.

Walls whisper³

Anyone who has ever listened to a Miley Cyrus song before can evoke its music in their head just by reading her name. Sound is an experience linked to being in the world. Its aerial and temporal qualities convey an unstable and omnidirectional perception, and a sense of uncertainty. It floats through the streets, through the walls, and even through people (cf. Toop, 2016, p. 63); like spirits or ghosts. In the city, perception is built in transit: partial, serial, cumulative (Torrijos, 1988, p. 29). Every time Miley Cyrus's name is read, an opportunity to hear her songs arises; every time one of her songs plays, her disembodied voice travels the airwaves in the form of an aural invocation. When Lefebvre describes space, he resorts to many sonic metaphors. He writes of 'waves, movements, rhythms, and frequencies' that 'collide and interfere' (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 87). The name of this journal also relates to sound. Alexei Monroe believes 'ideological and tonal noise are indissolubly linked', so noise in the system must be rendered audible (Monroe, 2005, pp. 127-128). Any signal can be turned into noise (Deseriis, 2017, p. 14). If a record can be scratched to *play* a rhythmic oscillation, then so can be the surface of a wall. A marker may scratch the oscillating ambiguity of absence and presence. While Miley plays on repeat, she's never fully present; yet she is continuously conjured, iterated. Miley Cyrus has ceased to refer simply to a person. The name on a wall is a rupture in the sign. The street sign, of course.

³ This subtitle references the lyrics of the song "These four walls" by Miley Cyrus.

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