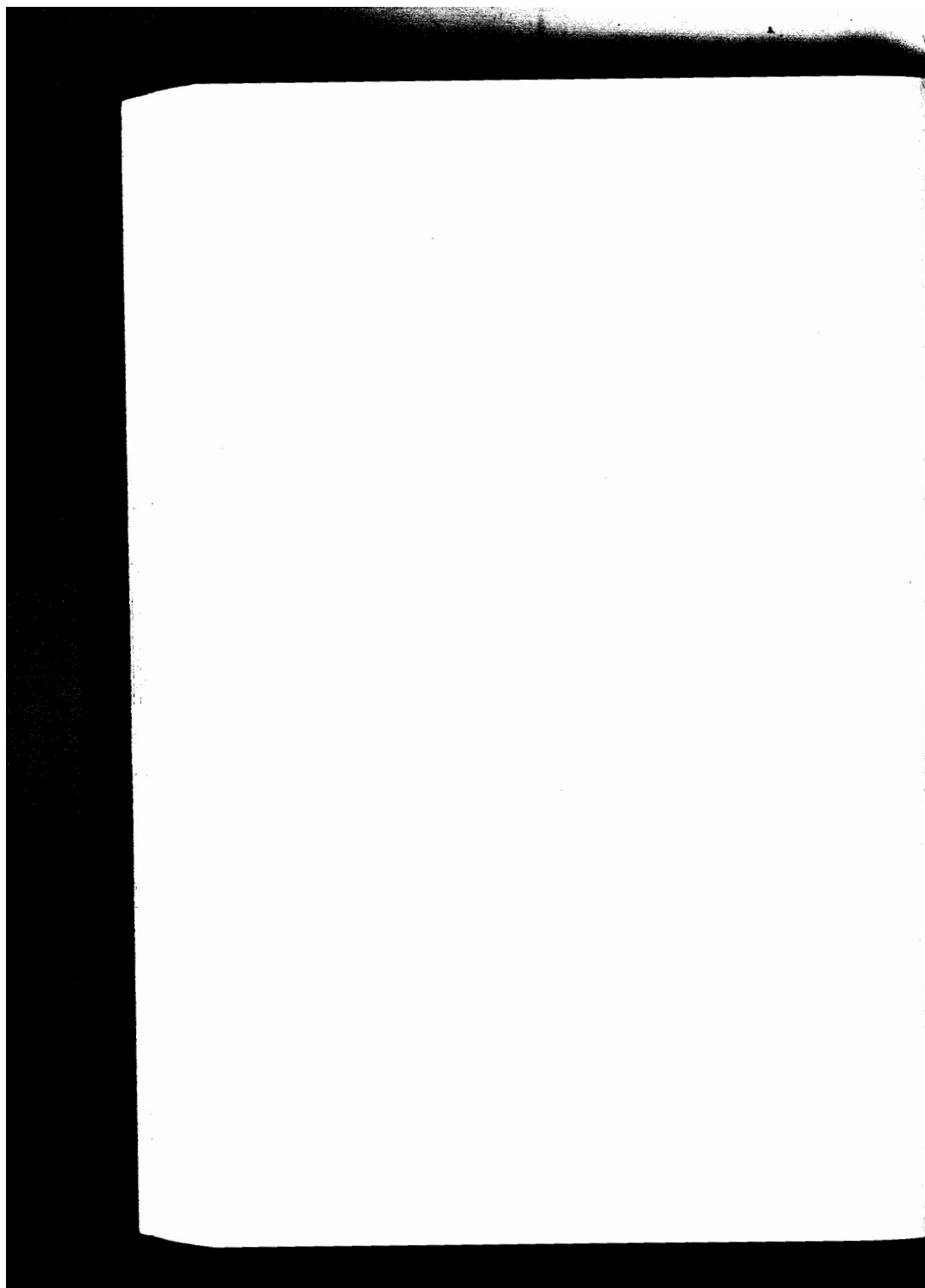


# Publishing as a Way of Creating *Wirklichkeit*



## ITALO SCHIAFFINO

*Buenos Aires, 1948–Buenos Aires, 1982*

It is probably true to say that no poet has ever been more diligent than Italo Schiaffino, not among his contemporaries in Buenos Aires at any rate, in spite of which was he was eventually overshadowed by the growing reputation of his younger brother, Argentino Schiaffino, also a poet.

The boys came from a humble family, and there were only two passions in Italo's life: soccer and literature. At fifteen, two years after leaving school to work as an errand boy in Don Ercole Massantonio's hardware store, he joined Enzo Raúl Castiglione's gang, one of the many groups of Boca Juniors hooligans that existed at the time.

He soon made headway. In 1968, when Castiglione was imprisoned, Italo Schiaffino took over the leadership of the group and wrote his first poem (his first recorded poem, in any case) and his first manifesto. Entitled *Cower, Hounds!*, the

poem is 300 lines long, and his friends from the gang could recite the highlights by heart. Basically, it is a war poem; in the words of Schiaffino, "a kind of *Iliad* for the Boca boys." A thousand copies were printed in 1969 with money raised by subscription. The edition contained a preface by Dr. Pérez Heredia in which he welcomed the new poet to the Argentinean Parnassus. The manifesto was a different matter. In five pages, Schiaffino outlined the situation of soccer in Argentina, lamented the crisis, identified the guilty parties (the Jewish plutocracy, which hadn't produced a single good player, and the Red intelligentsia, responsible for the nation's decadence). He indicated the danger and explained the ways to exorcize it. The manifesto was called *The Time of Argentinean Youth*, and in the words of Schiaffino it was "a kind of Latin American version of von Clausewitz, a wake-up call to the nation's inquiring minds." It soon became obligatory reading among the hard-line members of Castiglione's old gang.

In 1971, Schiaffino visited the widow Mendiluce, but there are no records, photographic or written, of their meeting. In 1972, he published *The Path to Glory*, a series of forty-five poems, each one examining the life of a different Boca Juniors player. Like *Cower, Hounds!* the book included an obliging preface by Dr. Pérez Heredia and a *nihil obstat* issued by the vice-president of the soccer club. The publication was financed by the members of Schiaffino's gang, who paid a subscription, and the remaining copies were sold in the vicinity of Boca's Bombonera stadium on match days. This time the sportswriters paid him some attention: two magazines deemed *The Path to Glory* worthy of a review, and when Dr. Pestalozzi's radio program *100% Soccer* organized a round table on the critical state of the national game, Schiaffino was

invited to participate. On the radio, in the company of well-known sports personalities, he was restrained.

In 1975 he delivered his next collection of poetry to the printer. Entitled *Like Wild Bulls*, it has a gaucho-like tone, which can reasonably be attributed to the influence of Hernández, Giraldes and Carriego. In it, Schiaffino recounts, sometimes in great detail, how he led the gang on excursions to various places in the province of Buenos Aires, as well as on two trips to Córdoba and Rosario, which resulted in victories for the visiting team and their hoarse supporters as well as sundry skirmishes, none of which degenerated into street battles, although a number of lessons were administered to isolated elements of the "enemy forces." In spite of its eminently bellicose tone, *Like Wild Bulls* is Schiaffino's most successful work. Exhibiting a degree of freedom and spontaneity unmatched elsewhere in his writing, it gives the reader a clear sense of the young poet's character and his bond with "the virginal spaces of the Fatherland."

In 1975, after the fusion of his gang with those of Honesto García and Juan Carlos Lentini, Schiaffino launched the triennial magazine *With Boca*, which thenceforth was to serve as a mouthpiece for the expression and diffusion of his ideas. In the first number of 1976, he published "Jews Out": out of the soccer stadiums naturally, not out of Argentina, but the essay was widely misunderstood and earned him many enemies. As did "Memoirs of a Malcontent Fan," published in the third number of 1976, in which Schiaffino, pretending to be a River Plate fan, pokes fun at the players and supporters of Boca's traditional rival. Parts II, III and IV of the "Memoirs" followed in the first and third numbers of 1977 and the first number of 1978. Unanimously acclaimed by the readers of *With Boca*, they were quoted by Colonel (retired) Persio

de la Fuente in an article on the idiom of the Latin American picaresque in the *University of Buenos Aires Semiotics Review*.

1978 was Schiaffino's year of glory. Argentina won the World Cup for the first time and the gang celebrated in the streets, which were transformed for the occasion into a vast parade ground. It was the year of "A Toast to the Boys," an excessive, allegorical poem, in which Schiaffino imagines a country setting forth to meet its destiny, united like one huge soccer gang. It was also the year in which "respectable," "adult" avenues opened up for him: his poem was widely reviewed, and not just in sports magazines. A Buenos Aires radio station offered him a job as a commentator; a newspaper with close links to the government offered him a weekly column on youth issues. Schiaffino accepted all the offers but before long his impetuous pen had alienated everyone. At the radio station and the newspaper it soon became clear that leading the Boca boys was more important to Schiaffino than being on any payroll. Broken ribs and windows resulted from the conflict, and the first of a long series of prison terms.

Without the support of his benefactors, Schiaffino's lyric inspiration seems to have dried up. From 1978 to 1982, he devoted himself almost exclusively to the gang and to bringing out *With Boca*, in which he continued to rail against the ills besetting soccer and Argentina.

His authority over the fan base remained undiminished. Under his leadership the Boca gang grew in numbers and strength as never before. His prestige, albeit obscure and secret, was unrivalled: the family album still contains photos of Schiaffino with players and club officials.

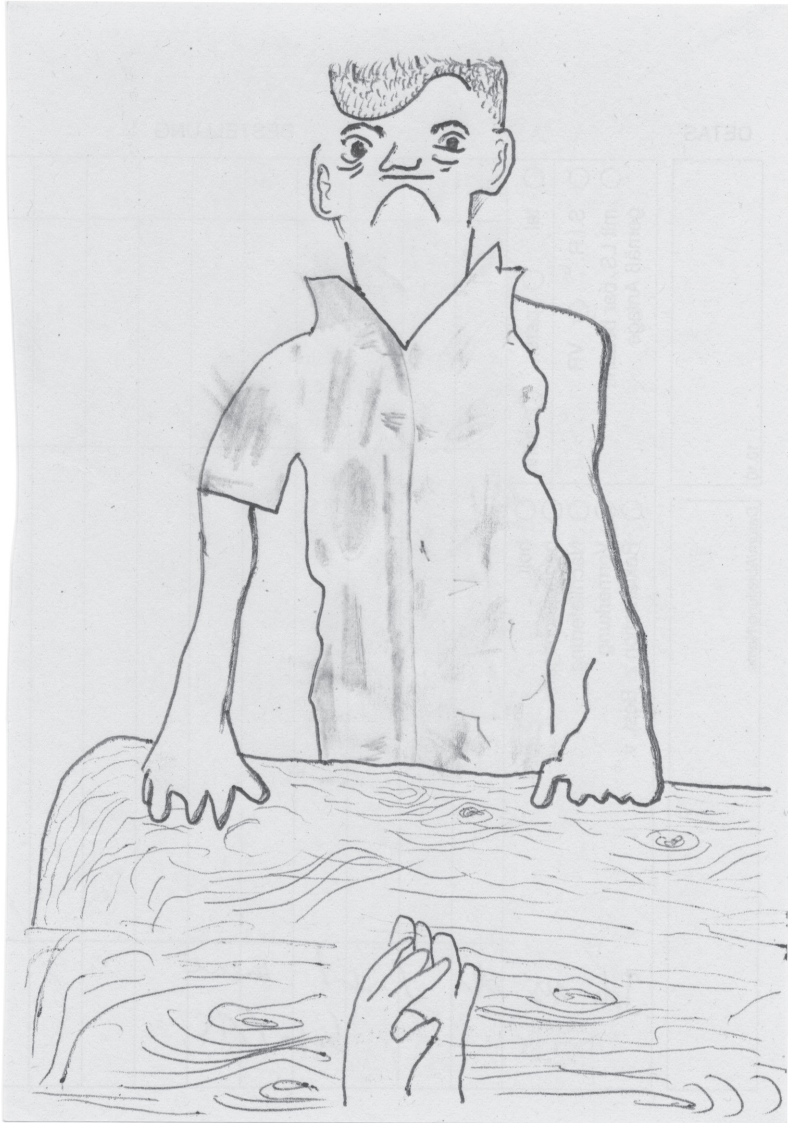
He died of a heart attack in 1982, while listening to one of the last reports on the Falklands War.

Wirklichkeit Books, founded in 2019 in Berlin, publishes books to find words, images and actions for a new actuality. The program will include titles by young artists side by side with historic positions relating to poetry, play, language, art. The form and material of the book, as knowledge carriers, are as important as the text and image content. Publishing is understood as an experimental and joyful act that engages with the travel of ideas and is seen as a way of creating *Wirklichkeit*.

\*Roberto Bolaño, *Nazi Literature in the Americas*, S. 157 - 160

Coming Soon:

Kyrill Constantinides Tank  
I Am Participating With This



Wie meine Chefin mich sieht, wenn ich sauer bin