

GIULIO SQUILLACCIOTTI

RMHC. THE SHAPING OF AN ARCHIVE FOR THE 90S ROMAN HARDCORE COMMUNITY

ABSTRACT

The scattered images here gathered document part of an archive of 'finds' from the 80s and 90s Hardcore-Punk music community from Rome, collected during seven years research for the shooting of the feature documentary film RMHC - 1989/1999 Hardcore a Roma.

This photo essay and related introduction unroll the different kinds of approaches used by the artist within the community, in order to establish an ordered list of the events told by the interviewed members of the scene, to determine a cultural knowledge upon material that so far struggled to be considered as worth to be shared, and to shape, through a work of 'translation', a choral film narrative which would stand clear even to a non-community/wider audience.

KEYWORDS

Punk, Hardcore, Rome, Film Documentary, Participatory Narrative

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His work is mainly oriented on storytelling, cultural apoxes and the way traditions re-shape in new contexts. His research merges together fiction and historical facts. Using film, documentary, sound and performance, Squillacciotti produces research-based investigations that revisit history, crafting new stories

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His work has been exhibited and screened internationally at, among the others, Centre Pompidou, Palais de Tokyo and Gayte Lyrique in Paris (F), Berlin Haus der Kultur der Welt and Neues Museum in Weimar (D), Screen Space in Melbourne (AU), Manifesta 8 in Murcia (E), Le Magasin CNAC in Grenoble (F), AKV of Den Bosch (NL), Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture (TR), Beirut Art Centre in Lebanon (RL), New York Photo Festival, Dumbo Video and the Columbia University in New York City (USA), Art Institute of Boston (USA), OCAT in Shanghai (PRC), PAC, Triennale and ViaFarini in Milan, MACRO, MAXXI and 16th Quadriennale of Rome, Sandretto Re Rebaudengo in Turin, and the Official Competition of the 33rd and 35th Torino Film Festival.

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The images collected in this photo essay portrait some of the materials (pictures, VHS videos, flyers from shows, letters, production notes) collected while I was involved in the shooting of some 60 hours of interviews for the feature documentary film *RMHC - 1989/1999 Hardcore a Roma*, a non-fiction film on the 80s and 90s Hardcore-Punk music community from Rome, shot over a period of seven years, from 2005 to 2012.

The aim that made me walk the first steps into this seven years research, was the idea of producing a film documentary which would have faced a series of issues related to the assumption of how a music and life style tradition, coming from the USA, took place in Rome in the 80s and 90s, overtaking what was the already existing post 70s political extra-parliamentary and Punk scene of the roman squats.

The ambition was to investigate, through a series of interviews, how a foreign phenomenon was first introduced in Rome from the USA and shaped locally through the chances Rome was offering at the time. As, to say, how a definite tradition can be re-invented by a shift of context, both cultural and geographical.

Focus of my research was the domestication of a foreign sub-culture before the days of internet and easy globalisation, when a community was distributing fanzines in lieu of web pages, and exchange records instead of file sharing. Being still active, nowadays, a Punk and Hardcore scene, I wanted to mark an historical difference pointing out the pioneering aspects that first made it possible.

Being myself an artist and film director, not an anthropologist so, I wanted to borrow, though, some of the features of the discipline in order to shape a sort of ethnographic glance at something close, both in time and cultural/geographical proximity. In addition, at the same time of the collection of datas through interviews, I started gathering some of the materials – every here and there mentioned as ‘finds’ in archeological terms – regarding the community and produced by the community. Finds as old VHS videos, pictures, fanzines, records, posters, tapes, silk-screened t-shirts, stood as a visual synthesis of what this sub-culture have been producing over the decade taken in analysis. The interesting aspect of this physical archive research was that more than half of the elements collected have never been shown before the film, as, to say, that the generation involved in the scene never felt the need to share it publicly.

Having myself taken part of that entourage marginally from 1996 to 1999, the main intent of the narrative of the

film, as of the approach to the investigated topics faced during the interviews, was to detach myself from what I already knew, in order not to fall into prejudices of an already served knowledge I thought I could have had. But I had indeed a sort of script to follow, and in order to build a narrative of scattered voices leading to a common and comprehensible film documentary, the very first need I had to face in my research was to find a methodology.

Starting from a group of personal acquaintances that introduced me to other interesting parties, I carried out the reconstruction of a recent past through the unique voices of the people who took on active roles in the creation – and later preservation – of the Hardcore entourage. As someone with a solid knowledge of the topic and certain memories of the aforementioned past, also beyond direct experience, I chronologically delineated the crucial elements on which to build the bulk of my questions, but there I stopped, allowing interviewees to speak freely and, if needed, refute my assumptions.

The initial impulse that set the collection of relevant material in motion came from the present state of Hardcore, which continues to exist in a different form, more accessible to the masses. Given that nowadays society is mostly accustomed to similar phenomena – in terms of both music and aesthetics – the research question arose based on curiosity regarding the ways of experiencing and making the most of this once marginal subculture. Concerning the chronological flow of events, I used the direct knowledge and memories of the documentary's protagonists to reconstruct a timeline of the genre's import from abroad, its localisation by certain bands and, lastly, its constant aesthetic and behavioral evolution until its demise.

As the first of the core research stages, devising the timeline was meant to organise the initial questions for the actors/protagonists and provide a structure in which to integrate the new notions obtained through the interviews and new contacts. These acquired notions constitute the second research stage, while their integration into the original framework helped to construct a story that could be narrated without the need for a script or pre-determined storyline.

The documentary was built while making it, looking at the footage and listening to the interviews, even though this change occurred during the progress of the work. Initially the idea was to direct the interviewees within a narrative established before the editing stage, where the actual discursive cut happens, but this thought imme-

diately disappeared once I acknowledged the anecdotes' potential. Consider it a sort of Copernican revolution of the narration, in which the author is actually a satellite revolving around the main events and not the central point. In the same vein, I eliminated the voiceover in favour of direct storytelling from the protagonists, followed by the necessary embedding of video material documenting the narrated time, the 'finds'.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this collection – devoid of any historiographical intention – was that it was performed through concrete, non-digital means, and not through indirect sources such as TV or the Internet. Not unlike the protagonists' own research of the phenomenon, when it was still largely unknown, my documentation was also based on physically visiting strangers and asking them for objects and memorabilia in order to catalog and archive useful information. In other words, if in the 80s or early 90s a teenager wanted to find out more about this music genre, and all that it entailed, he/she could not simply do so via the usual avenues, but had to physically search for it, follow people and ask them in person for more details. My acquisition of materials for the documentary thus emulated that of the protagonists, as I abandoned the possibilities afforded by contemporary media and embraced a personal journey through anachronistic meetings at record stores, bar outings, phone calls, watching VHS recordings on VCRs, listening to tapes on cassette players, examining photo negatives, playing vinyl records and so on.

The steps outlined above only became apparent as they were unfolding. They became parameters without parameters, like shooting without knowing what to expect, more out of the desire to immerse oneself in the explored environment than to tell its story, eventually witnessing the elements come together in a unified narrative. Then, during editing, technique becomes complementary to the narration constructed by the interviewees and a means for the viewers to enjoy it.

As previously underlined, the initial approach to the interviews came through the protagonists I already knew. With them, I could have informal conversations where I could deconstruct our common knowledge and then create a list of topics that helped delineate the scope of future discussions. It was through these first interviews, conducted at the end of 2005, that I managed to establish the framework for the next batch – namely what, how and whom to ask and, most importantly, from where to generate interest in sharing a dialogic vocabulary. Many of those

interviewed in the second round – people I had not previously met – unsurprisingly showed a certain distrust in the interviewer and skepticism about the need for this type of project. After initial caution, though, the most remarkable realisation about the importance of past and now-abandoned achievements takes place when a third party shows interest in it. An experience becomes a carrier of culture that one is unaware of until requested to narrate it in front of someone. In that moment, the interviewees acknowledge that the interviewer is trying to gather all relevant experiences into a lasting memento, capable of transmitting them to those not in the know.

Here the documentary's priority comes into play, the self-awareness as part of a community whose collective memory has to be preserved through individual recollections. In other words, individual remembrance is key to the social memory of an entire group. The common view held by the documentary's protagonists – instilled by an increased societal acceptance of the elements introduced by their pioneering efforts – functions as a framework for their discourse, now taking the form of a monologue. Research on the protagonists purposefully started between 10 and 20 years since the happenings discussed in the film took place. This was to avoid the risk of a voluntary oblivion of a far, juvenile period. The past, in fact, is hidden and repressed by the needs of present action, since the protagonists are now living very differently from their old, hardcore ways (even though not necessarily estranged from their original spirit). The process of reconstructing the past is obviously gradual, but, given the proximity of events, it is also relatively simple. Albeit distant, this fragmented consciousness starts to reassemble from the precise moment personal recollections of the past are reactivated by the newly acquired awareness of their present relevance. In the bigger picture, these single memories aggregate to form the collective, group memory.

Perhaps the most interesting element, apart from the narration of the distinctive events that marked the development of Hardcore in Rome, is the newfound awareness of the genre's path and the will to remember it through narration itself. Years later, a seemingly juvenile movement is remembered, still in time as a human experience, but whose character still lingers in the lives of its protagonists. This is the current distance from the phenomenon today, after it has received a number of inputs that have levelled its once local characteristic to a homogenous global style.

As contemporary individuals ‘suicided by society’, in spite of their different backgrounds, these people brought forth ideas and ways of doing things that are uncommon and, again, I like to think that my presence there as interviewer, somehow, made possible the constitution of self-awareness in the interviewed upon the cultural value of that past which, for some of them, hasn’t turned their actual present into something glorious.

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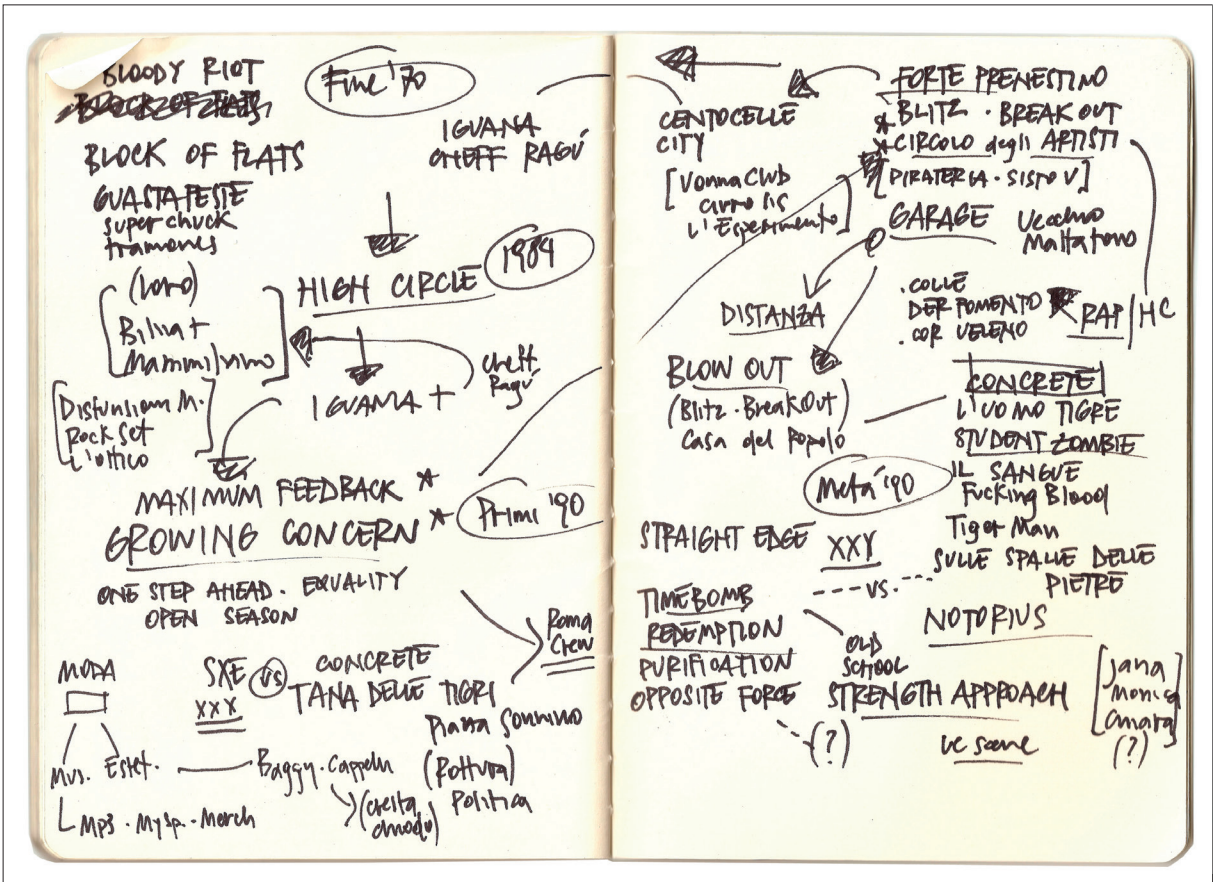
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Fotografia 1

Rome, Uonna Club. 1984. The band High Circle. The very first band from Rome to clearly taking inspiration from the American Hardcore music (and lifestyle) rather than from the British Punk Scene. Features of the band outfits are clearly referable to American Bands of the 80s, something so far unknown and never seen in a Roman squat context. From the archive of Massimiliano Ruggeri and Giampaolo Billia.



Fotografia 2

Rome, 2005. The very first step of the research, before even starting the shooting of the interviews, was to draw a graphical map on how, in my knowledge, the scene presumably developed. Name of bands, years and places are listed in a probable timeline of the events along with names of people which, in my assumptions, should have been able to tell a portion of the story. The topics and the structure of the film, obviously, didn't follow this presumable timeline, but the narrative was rather based on an on-going base through what the interviewed protagonists told and listed as memorable events.



Fotografia 3

Rome, 1988 or 1989. Years later from the High Circle scene, this picture portrays the first bunch of members forming the part of the early Roman Hardcore community, the so-called 'Roma Crew'. The picture was taken at the squat Centro Sociale Break Out, one of the first venues where the Roman Hardcore Community started setting shows on its own, without any support from the already existing Punk Scene. Some 'Xs' are easy to spot painted on a few of the hands photographed, as to testify their commitment to the Straight Edge movement. The Straight Edge movement, born in USA in the 80s, states how punk life can be lived without drugs and alcohol. The Roman way to live it was in response to the local 70s punk political context where drugs were of common use. From the archive of Paolo Petralia.



Fotografia 4

Rome, 1991. A letter from Germany to Inti Carboni (one of the member of the Roman scene) in response to one of the many requests to organise a show out of Rome. In the 80s and 90s, before the internet came to hands of the Roman community, traditional mail correspondence was the only way to organise tours for bands in Europe as worldwide. It was very significant to me as a 'find' to unveil the real commitment needed at the time to stepping out of Rome. From the archive of Inti Carboni.



Fotografia 5 e 6

Somewhere between French and Italian border, 1990/1991. The band Concrete on a European tour. Following the preceding letter, these images stand as a proof on how tours took the road and how daily life on tour was lived. A considerable portion of the film is dedicated - through images and interviews - to the topic of taking the road on self organised tours, way before Booking Agencies appeared in the scene. From the archive of Gregorio Luciani.



Fotografia 7

Rome, Circolo degli Artisti, 1995. Stage diving during an Evidence show. In later years the crowd attending Hardcore shows increased considerably due to the system of promoting shows. Photo by Dario Ruggiero.



Fotografia 8

Rome, 1995. Flyer from a concert at the squat Centro Sociale Break Out. Before a regular use of computers to design street posters, the way to promote Hardcore shows was through the use of copy machines where venues, name of bands and timings were shaped by cutting and pasting letters from papers. From the archive of Simone Molla.



Fotografia 9 e 10

Torino, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, 2010. Half way to the production of the film, I've been invited to take part at the group show 21x21 - 21 Artisti per il XXI Secolo curated by Francesco Bonami. I decided to display all the finds collected at that stage, along with a small portion of the interviews gathered so far, in order to give a tangible perspective of what my research physically was. The idea of scratching through real archives rather than in digital ones, was prevalent as a statement to the kind of research I was conducting. Vinyl records, fanzines, pictures, digitalised VHS, tapes, patches, and t-shirts are displayed as archeological finds from a close past. Photos by Mathieu Vermeer.



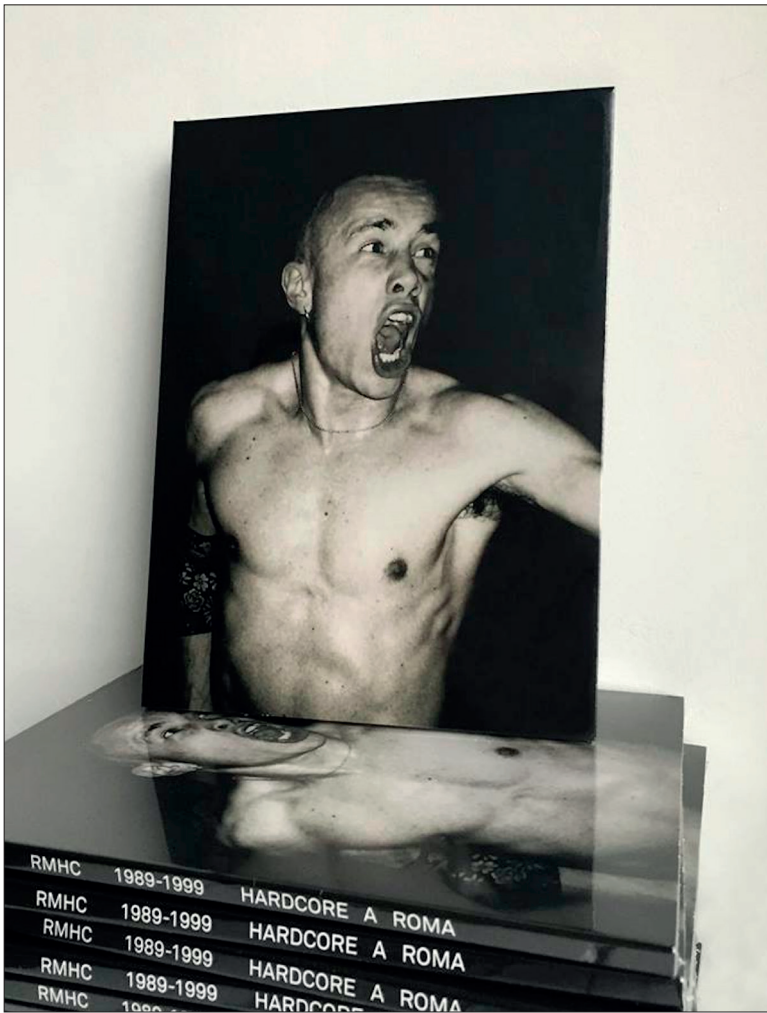
Fotografia 11

Rome, Liceo Mamiani, 1995. The band *Sulle spalle delle Pietre* performing during a high school occupation. The kind of life style and music the Hardcore scene was proposing - the idea that everybody could take part at it with his own, even poor, skills - overflow so much that occupied schools became last minute stages where to perform. Photo by Dario Ruggiero.



Fotografia 12

Rome, 2012. The 'restitution' of the research in the shape of a film. In 2012, seven years after the first interviews were shot, I finally came to an end of the film. I decided to screen it publicly in an anonymous non-scene related neither art related venue in order not to associate the event too much to an already existing context, both from the past as for the present. The audience was of some 500 attendees, the event took two non-planned screenings. Photo by Roberto Albigi.



Fotografia 13

2014. The DVD of Roma Hardcore - 1989/1999 Hardcore a Roma. Two years after the premiere in Rome and a screening tour worldwide, I decided not to post the film online, but to rather follow the DIY (Do It Yourself) convictions and self-pressing a DVD, an object and not a file. In a sort of etymologically valuable statement, I wanted to close the circle of the past by 'doing at home', the same way it has been done so far in the scene, before the internet.



Fotografia 14

Following the metaphor of archeological finds, this last image stands as a proof of how the research in the basements of the people was conducted. This still from a Super 8 film portrait a Growing Concern show in the early 90s. The film was found still closed in a Super 8 camera, un-processed, in a box. It was only later processed and digitalised by myself but never used in the film.