

4.6. Retaking the tragedy: Creative practices and meanings of politics in the Bogotá hardcore

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Abstract

This work studies the hardcore scene in Bogotá in order to approach the understanding of the relationship between creative practices and the different meanings of politics that have emerged in that space, over a period comprising the past decade, focusing on a particular group of anarchist tendencies, affiliated to different political movements. It seeks no longer to describe, classify, or make an apologetic work of hardcore; it now seeks to demystify it through a critical look, to problematize the scene, to show it as a place of flesh and blood, where personal relations and affectivity have a huge important role that goes unnoticed behind the veils of a certain type of selective and outdated politics, and a music that moves and thrills but in the end is destined to the particular interests of those involved in the space. This article, then, is an overview of my master's thesis.

Keywords: hardcore, politics, creative practices, Bogotá, cultural studies.

Introduction (to the tragedy)

My work seeks to generate a reflection that serves as a precedent to whoever wants to think the Bogotá hardcore scene far beyond the slippery and seductive surface of the images and sounds, to whoever considers that hardcore can become more than just music. Therefore, it becomes a structured attempt to document the political stream of Bogota hardcore that emerged over the last decade, in terms of the relationship between its creative practices and meanings of politics.

One could say that the relationship between music and politics is crucial for understanding the creative practices of this group. However, the inquiry made through different sources (archive and interviews) gave certain turns to the investigation, which I believe constitute different contributions to the approaches that have traditionally dealt with this kind of musical groups in Cultural Studies and Social Sciences. Focusing on the methodologies of ethnographic interview and autoethnography I have been able to reconstruct the life stories of a selection of different people that remarkably influenced the development of political hardcore in Bogotá. I compiled a central life story, using it as a basis for the reconstruction of specific stories, related to the musical, political and creative life, taking affectivity as a cross-category, in tune with the dialogue between the affective turn and Cultural Studies.

The tragedy is not primarily unhappiness or misfortune. It is rather a struggle between two opposing forces. This struggle reveals the mutual need of the forces and only remains as the dispute does not reach a point of equilibrium. Sometimes a force takes over the other, but there is never such a thing as a cancellation. Hence the inherent mobility that accompanies the tragedy and its utility for characterizing the history of worldwide and Colombian hardcore. In this way, and simply put, our hypothesis is that hardcore does not have a beginning or a homogeneous development, but is based on the clash between at least two different forces (...)².

I retake this concept of tragedy because I believe that it is a relevant idea in a time when different forces operate in the hardcore scene, in which the referent of political hardcore is in great disadvantage against other meanings, so for some it has become urgent to its resignification and reconstitution.

In accordance with the above, the overall objective of my work is to investigate the construction of meanings of politics through the creative practices staged by the political hardcore of Bogota. As derivations of this goal, I proposed to establish which disputes, tensions and contradictions crosses the meanings of politics in hardcore practices; examine the practices, the subjects, the creative processes and the meanings of politics that have

¹ Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá, Colombia.

² Quote from the fanzine "La tragedia del hardcore. Una perspectiva de la historia del hardcore mundial y colombiano", Textos Libertarios #8, 2011, originally published by *Colectivo Contracultura (Counterculture collective)*.

constituted this group since the milestone of *Evolución Bogotá Hardcore* (2002); and finally, document milestones, appropriations, the comings and goings, and the workings of the manifestations that developed this group, through a selection of archival material (printed material, digital images, digital and analog video, recovered websites and analog and digital audio).

“If not political it is not hardcore”: hardcore and politics

The reconstruction of the main life story evidenced the incidence of the most important milestones of the Bogotan political hardcore in its configuration. However, it is suggested to investigate the origin of the process of politicization and the places and roles that these milestones played throughout its trajectory.

Seeds of politicization

This seeds can be understood as a gesture of initial negativity, a distancing and a reaction against the status quo. The hardcore kids of the nineties were more or less serious about the idea of being the outcasts of society, the nonconformist alternative to what mainstream represents, or the bulk of society. This implied a kind of alienation from the mainstream, a "departure" that took place in the space of the underground, where hardcore made sense for being different from what others typically listen, for its sound and lyrical content, and because it could be produced by anyone without the intervention of the music industry and the media. These ideas have a strong bias towards identity debates, which in the opinion of my interviewees are left behind with the help and the orientation provided by politics, which it is both a motivation and a good leading thread of the energies and purposes of hardcore.

Milestones

I identified five major milestones through the reconstruction of the main life story. The first was a process of deterritorialization that happened in the late nineties, which was characterized by the expansion of the hardcore scene throughout the city, whose activity was highly concentrated in the northern area. The meeting of *parches* (crews) from different areas involved antagonism and dialogue between different forms of experimenting hardcore, that were initially scattered and isolated from each other.

Second, the rupture with the extreme right wing band *Sin Salida* brought access to new ideas. *Sin Salida* occupied for a long time the space of the scene without being subjected to any criticism, but the political output that they showed in the late nineties dispelled any doubts that my interviewees had about them and facilitated a schism which would result in the possibility of thinking and building other forms of hardcore.



Figure 1 – Cover of the booklet “La tragedia del hardcore”, 2011.



Figure 2 – Some flyers of hardcore shows at the end of the 1990's.



Figure 3 – Detail of the booklet of "A los héroes", a seminal record of *Sin Salida*, 1996.

Thirdly, my interviewees made a couple of trips to Brazil, arranged through their contact networks. They had the opportunity to meet the Sao Paulo hardcore scene, characterized by a high degree of politicization, organization, and coordination with the social movements. In this context, there was a significant exchange of symbolic, political and cultural capitals that enriched the seed of their political commitment, allowing them to think of a different staging from that which existed in Bogota, a political proposal open to dialogue, questioning and debate.

Fourth, the encounter with the anarcopunk in the space of the meetings of the National University anarchists was determinant to break down the prejudices between the two groups and pave the way for the possibility of feeding the experiences of either, punk and hardcore, by establishing links through which would circulate ways of understanding and working politics, creative practices, musical projects and affections.



Figure 4 – *Point Of No Return* of Sao Paulo, one of the greatest influences of the political hardcore in Bogotá.



Figure 5 – Cover of the fanzine included in the compilation *Sonidos para activar la revolución* (2004).



Figure 6 – Cover of the compilation *Sonidos para activar la revolución* (2004).

Finally, the compilation *Evolución Bogotá Hardcore* (2002) was the result of all the above processes. It was not only a statement of the management of projects under the *Do It Yourself ethics*, but it set a precedent by a radiography of that particular moment in the scene, seeking to leave behind the traditional narrative of the nineties (the Santafe de Bogota hardcore, SBHC), in favor of a new narrative. To this end, some texts were included, created from the idea of "the edge of hardcore", referring to the need to make hardcore massive, not in the sense of reaching wide audiences through mass media, but to make massive the presence and the work of the hardcore kids in conjunctural spheres of society (universities, social movements, neighborhoods, etc.), whereupon hardcore would really become something more than music. Hardcore reaches its limit when it meets politics and begins to be insufficient given its characteristics and its small size and impact on the reality of our country, so it becomes

imperative that its participants start looking for other modes of organization in coordination with social actors. Then, the scene would be transformed into a school, a gateway to politics, where those involved would come in contact with the reality of the country, with new forms of organization, with the DIY ethics, with various discussions related to politics, music, animal liberation, etc.

Hardcore/punk

Following the meeting with the anarcopunks, and in view of the impossibility of politicizing the traditional scene, my interviewees and their colleagues decided to create their own political scene: the hardcore/punk. This scene was strongly linked to the *Coordinadora Libertaria Banderas Negras* (an anarchist collective organization), an anarchist organization that was the place of convergence of the collectives and bands of my interviewees, the anarcho-punks, and other interested partners. *Contracultura* (Counterculture) was one of the most active collectives of the organization, and its goal was to connect with the hardcore/punk scene through the organization and dissemination of events and initiatives, writing texts about hardcore and political work, working in recording projects, and other activities.

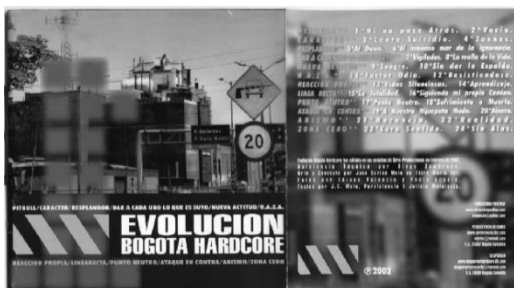


Figure 7 – Detail of the cover and the label of *Evolución Bogotá Hardcore*.



Figure 8 – Members of *Colectivo Contracultura*.



Figure 9 – Logo of the *Coordinadora Libertaria Banderas Negras*.

There's no emotion: Affective life

Passion and investment are two key elements in understanding the peculiarities of emotion in hardcore. While projects begin with a certain bet of organization, logistics, economics, communication, etc., they do not correspond to the terms of an investment in its traditional economic sense, where the quantity and quality of invested items must return in some time, expanded and improved. The interest in supporting, creating, developing and disseminating a scene project is not based initially in numbers or administrative management to generate profit, but a passion, leaving the skin on the projects; is all or nothing, sacrificing time, effort, money, affections, and so on, for hardcore, and above all, by trying to create a different space for discussion of new ideas, in line with a commitment to create a new relationship with the creative and aesthetic expressions, different from the mercantile, and not merely a musical scene. In principle, hardcore is done for the sake of doing it, but other incentives are added along the way, like politics. Besides passion, I found three demonstrations of affection: friendship, romantic relationships and the nostalgia/disenchantment-binary.

Friendship

In the conjuncture of the process of politicization, the friendships of my interviewees suffered a turn, they left behind those old friends who did not ascribe to this process, to the point of generating conflicts and hostilities; the matter is radical, condemning to irrelevance all the personal relationships that were not linked to politics. Thus, their circle of friends is reconfigured, establishing parallel bonds with people interested in politics, forming a new circle. Also, some of my interviewees think that hardcore social formations such as collectives or bands are machines

that need to be oiled, and beyond the political stakes, the affective is the lubrication for those machines, since affection can be a potent political force itself.

Romantic relationships

The emotional intensity of the romantic relationships reverberated greatly in the political development of the scene during the era of hardcore/punk. My interviewees recognize the importance of this aspect, transversal to their experience. They consider that the bonds that were established contributed to consolidate the project while they were fueling the personal experience of those involved in various ways; punks learned from the hardcore kids and vice versa, something that might not have been possible without the presence of these relationships and the invested affections. Therefore, even though some of the projects and relationships are now over, some still exist outside of music.

Nostalgia and disenchantment

Hardcore is pure disenchantment. It is ephemeral, because its uptime is really short, as the projects last at most a couple of years, and takes place in a time of life in which there is little experience, mistakes and setbacks are constant, and the vital becomings of those involved begin to generate tensions. My interviewees distinguish between the disenchantment produced by those who “sell out”, especially in political and emotional terms, and the disenchantment produced by teen idols falling. Nostalgia takes place when we are unable to find in today's hardcore what once fascinated, moved and touched us, and made it part of our lives, when the scene diverts to vague logics produced from the depoliticization of the space.

“There are the instruments, it's time to make use of them”: Creative practices

Most of the creative practices of hardcore orbit around the musical creation. I think that what has really changed over time are the referents to which people ascribe when they get in touch with the scene, a process that is also linked to the transformation of practices. The referents are the predominant narratives with which people find themselves when they first encounter hardcore, and through which can generate bonds and familiarity with the music and other people. The referents change over time, to the point that today the political referent created by my interviewees has lost its force and has given place to others.

The means by which the referents endure not only have to do with the number of people who belong to them, but with certain practices of transmission. Thus, recording projects are conduits through which referents can spread, and equally, the relationship between clothing and the image it produces on the interested persons, which is usually the first element that they can appropriate from hardcore. In short, the creative practices of the scene are tools that help forge the referents. In the case of political hardcore, its referent is not only formed from the introduction of certain practices that the scene was unaware of at the time, but thanks to the political use made of such practices.



Figure 10 – Main record labels of the political hardcore, Dirección Positiva Records, Persistencia Records; main bands of the political hardcore, Res Gestae and Reacción Propia.

Labels, bands and recording projects

In this section, I detail the practices related to musical creation. First, *Dirección Positiva* and *Persistencia Records*, which are record labels created by my interviewees for purposes of creating and distributing the material. These labels played a very important role in the establishment of contact networks that facilitated projects of a different nature, such as editions, events or tours. Secondly, I walk (look) the history of the two main bands of the hardcore/punk scene, *Reacción Propia* and *Res Gestae*, and I briefly outline the other bands derived from this process, *Nagaf* and *La Vendetta*.

Writing

In this section I detail the particularities of the practice of writing in the hardcore/punk scene. This practice was guided by various political uses, ranging from the dissemination of the idea of "the hardcore limit", to the construction of the historical memory of the scene. The fruits of this creative work were, first, a series of booklets called "Textos Libertarios", signed by the *Colectivo Contracultura* (Collective Counterculture), which included translations of foreign anarchist collectives, like *CrimethInc.*; second, explanatory texts accompanying the lyrics of the songs in the booklet of the CDs, whose aim was to broaden the content of the songs, or to explain some ideas that were not clear, and may include links to other topics related to the contents of the lyrics; finally, scene reports, articles for libertarian publications and fanzines.

An ideal world for men: Gender

The gender issue is presented as an initial suspicion, given the disproportionate male presence in the scene, and the relegation of the minimal role of women to the male interests. The reconstruction of the central life story realizes the marked absence of women in the Bogotá hardcore scene at the dawn of the century, which was stressed with the presence of punk girls who took part due to the encounter with anarcopunk, an event that helped to create a referent for subsequent generations of women. On the other hand, the traditional narrative of the hardcore scene of the nineties included a strong stealthy homophobia, which is a characteristic of the homosociality male spaces, which was fractured following the outbreak of homosexual subjects in the middle of the last decade, like the case of Nicolás, *Res Gestae's* bass player, the first openly gay man in the history of the scene. However, my analysis reveals that while women have gained visibility and some prominence over time, their roles in the scene are still set by the male interests and privileges, and sexism reigns stealthy, protected by narratives like those of the "machos de izquierda" (male left wing sexists), free love instrumental for this purposes, and competition between women sponsored by men.

By way of conclusion: the tragedy does not end

The lack of an optimal generational shift process caused the referent of political hardcore to lose the dominance it had during the past decade. The key referent of today is more like the traditional narrative of the nineties than the hardcore practiced by my interviewees. Still, I believe that its commitment to reaching the limit of hardcore, by making it a gateway to politics through the political use of its practices, is a must for building a political referent, with all the problems and contradictions that it may have. Here we would also have a struggle to fill the significant of "politics" in context, because I believe that this project, in its sense of *school*, should be pierced by multiple forms and meanings of the political. Self-criticism, the appreciation of the role of collective work and practices, the recognition of both mistakes and successes, and assessing the previous experiences of others, are unavoidable tasks in the bid to build a new referent for our scene.

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