Progressive nostalgia. Appropriating memories of protest and contention in contemporary Italy

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Abstract

More than 30 years ago the violent death - on 11 March 1977 - of a left-wing student in the Italian city of Bologna brought an end to a student protest movement, the 'Movement of '77'. Today nostalgia dominates public commemorations of the movement as it manifested itself in Bologna. However, this memory is not an exclusive memory of the 1977 generation. A number of young, left-wing activists that draw on the myth of 1977 in Bologna and in particular on the memory of the local Workers Autonomy faction appropriate this memory in a similarly nostalgic manner. This article then explores the value of nostalgia in generational memory: how does it relate to past, present and future, and to what extent does it influence processes of identity formation among youth groups? I argue that nostalgia is more than a longing for the past, and that it can be conceived as progressive and future-orientated, providing empowerment for specific social groups.

Keywords

Nostalgia, generational memory, 1970s, Italian student movements, Workers Autonomy.

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'Pagherete caro, pagherete tutto!'[1]

On 12 March 2011, this slogan reverberated in the streets of the Italian city of Bologna, 34 years after left-wing student Francesco Lorusso was shot dead by police during student protests. Lorusso's disputed and unresolved death on 11 March 1977 - for which the police officer who shot him was never tried - as well as the violent incidents that subsequently kept Bologna in a state of high tension, have left a deep wound in the city, in particular among Lorusso's former companions and friends. During the 34th anniversary of the incident, the latter thus organized a protest march through the city centre where the abovementioned slogan, one of the most popular and well known slogans of the extra-parliamentary left in the 1970s, imbued the commemoration with nostalgia for a lost political cause and, perhaps, also for an irretrievable youth.

However, the public memory of Lorusso's death is not an exclusive memory of the 1977 generation. A number of young, left-wing activists that draw on the myth of the 1970s, in particular on the Autonomia Operaia faction (Workers Autonomy, AO) and the incidents of March 1977, also participated in the march, giving evidence of a similarly nostalgic appropriation of this memory. But how to interpret a sense of nostalgia for a past which one has not lived directly? In other words, how can one long for events not experienced personally? This article will then explore the value of nostalgia in generational memory: how does it relate to past, present and future, and to what extent does it influence processes of identity formation among youth groups? I will argue that nostalgia is much more than a longing for the past, and that it can also be conceived as progressive and future-orientated, providing empowerment for specific groups in the present.

Rethinking nostalgia

The concept of nostalgia has been interpreted in a variety of ways since the late 17th century, when Swiss physician Johannes Hofer introduced it in order to designate a condition of extreme homesickness among Swiss mercenaries fighting abroad (Davis 1977: 414). At the

[1] English translation: 'You will pay dearly, you will pay for everything'.

time, it was considered a disease and hence firmly rooted in medical discourse. Towards the end of the 19th century, the term was disconnected from its pathological base and entered ordinary speech, referring to a sense of longing for lost past (415). In line with the impact of modernity on the nature of time and our experience of it, this involved - as Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley (2006) argue - a shift from *spatial* dislocation to *temporal* dislocation (922). Due to a growing sense of generational self-awareness and a new sense of time, the latter was no longer seen as linear but as discontinuous and cyclical.[2]

Nostalgia has thus been used 'to identify both a sense of personal loss and longing for an idealized past, and a distorted public version of a particular historical period or a particular social formation in the past' (Pickering-Keightley 2006: 922). Nostalgia is, in other words, a reaction to 'the velocity and vertigo of modern temporality', an attempt to regain a sense of continuity and coherence 'unavailable in the fragmented modern or late modern environment' (923). More recently, however, scholars have argued that nostalgia is not simply a product of the past and can therefore not be reduced to a yearning for what is no longer attainable in the present. It is very much connected to this present, in that it selectively constructs the past so as to create a subjective contrast *in* the present (Davis 1977: 417). Consequently, nostalgia 'may tell us more about present moods than past realities' (416). This in order to maintain, construct or reconstruct identities in the present, so that nostalgia is 'implicated importantly in the continuities and discontinuities we experience in our sense of self' (419).

In this article we will see how important nostalgia has been not only for the old generation of 1977, in recent reconstructions of their collective identity, but also for younger generations of left-wing activists and their search for iconic figures and mythological pasts to base their political identity upon. First, however, we need to understand the historical and social context in which the student protests of 1977 originated, and the role of the Autonomia Operaia in those protests.

The Italian 1970s: violence and Autonomia

The 1970s in Italy have been marked by a high level of political violence, perpetrated by left-wing and neo-fascist terrorist organisations, by groups performing 'armed struggle', and by state (supported) violence, although there is - unsurprisingly - little public consensus on the involvement of the state. Consequently, conflicting and selective memories of this decade,

[2] See also Smith (1998) on modernity and nostalgia.

known better as the *anni di piombo* or 'years of lead' (lead being a metaphor for bullets), continue to divide the nation.[3] The second half of the decade, in particular, saw a dramatic increase in terrorist attacks, and the abduction and assassination of Christian Democrat leader Aldo Moro - one of the key figures in the project of the so-called 'historical compromise' - created a 'cultural trauma' (Alexander 2004) that would leave its mark on the public memory of the 1970s.[4]

The student protests of 1977 fell right in the middle of these developments, and consequently have far more negative connotations than any previous protest movement. Indeed, 1977 is nowadays often presented as a synthesis of the entire *anni di piombo*, an 'apotheosis of violence and death' (Bellassai 2009: 225), connected almost exclusively to the radical Autonomia Operaia (AO) faction within the protest movements of 1977. Furthermore, the so-called Movement of '77 opposed itself not only to the political right, but attacked traditional left-wing parties and unions as well. The national elections of 1976, in particular, had disappointed many young left-wing activists who had given their vote to the Italian Communist Party (PCI), only to see the PCI give its indirect support to the centre-right government that was subsequently formed. This produced, together with the dissolution of the extra-parliamentary groups of the left, a political void among young left-wing activists which in part was filled up by Autonomia Operaia.

Founded in 1973 by a variety of autonomous organisations active mostly in factories across the nation, this social movement drew on themes of 'workerism'[5] and on the experience of the Italian labour movement of the 1960s. Throughout the years, though, members of other subgroups within the alternative left-wing milieu - the countercultural, feminist and upcoming ecological movement, for example - flowed into the organisation. We might therefore say that AO functioned somewhat as a 'safety net' which caught up the various elements of the left-wing milieu that no longer felt represented by the historical left. Indeed, in this period two of the major extra-parliamentary groups which had managed to give a political identity to the alternative left-wing milieu split up. Some continued their battle on a more 'institutional' level, but most former members of these and other extra-

[3] For an analysis of the origins of the notion of 'years of lead' and its short-comings (and political connotations) as a reference to the Italian 1970s, see O'Leary 2007 and Hajek 2010. On the notion of 'divided memories', see Foot (2009).

[4] The 'historical compromise' was launched in 1972by Italian Communist Party secretary Enrico Berlinguer. It foresaw an alliance with the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) and the Communists' main opponent, the Christian Democrats. Amyot 1981.

[5] I.e. autonomous working-class power, direct action in workplace and community, etc. Edwards 2009: 70.

parliamentary groups - in want of a political identity - joined Autonomia, the only independent and non-institutional organisation that remained in tact within the left-wing milieu (Bianchi 2007). AO was not a party, though, but an 'area', a 'galaxy' of groups 'built around local issues and affinity relationships' (Edwards 2009: 74-75). Hence it lacked a strong, central organisation, and changed according to regional differences.

In *Multitude* (2005), Michael Hardt and former Autonomia leader Toni Negri trace the development of this decentred or polycentric 'guerrilla model' - as opposed to the centralized military structure of the Red Brigades for example - to changes in the labour force and in the forms of social production in the 1970s, i.e. the shift from a Fordist to a post-Fordist production.[6] As we shall see, these changes will prove significant for the way younger generations of activists reconnect with other communities in their shaping of a political identity today.

This also implied that Autonomia refused the traditional work ideology promoted mostly by the PCI, which illustrates the more complex relation between the protest movements of the late 1970s and traditional left-wing parties as opposed to the late 1960s. Through the refusal of work, AO asserted proletarian power, declaring independence - or 'autonomy' - from capital and from political parties, including the unions. Hence, if the refusal of work was considered - until the late 1960s - a form of self-defence against bad working conditions in factories, with the Autonomia it becomes a self-proclaimed way of life, a form of identity. This is due not only to the shift to post-Fordism and with that the creation of a new young working class, with very different ideas about work, leisure, and austerity. It is also the outcome of the boost given by the 1969 workers' protests and the increasing economic hardship in the 1970s.[7] In the mid-1970s, Autonomia thus moves out of the factories and starts to diffuse through occupations of houses and the so-called 'auto-reductions', applied not to basic expenses such as gas and electricity bills - as had happened in the 1960s - but performed also on luxury objects (e.g. cinema and restaurants), which reflects the predominantly existential (as opposed to political) needs of this new generation.

AO was therefore a highly radical group within the 1970s protest generation, for whom the Red Brigades were a constant reference point. Not surprisingly, media and official historiography often equate(d) the *autonomi* with terrorists. However, there were divergences

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[6] 80-82. The Red Brigades, a terrorist organisation of the extreme left, are among the most famous terrorist groups of the decade. This is primarily to the abduction and assassination of Aldo Moro in 1978, but their 'fame' has also been (re)constructed, in more recent years, through (auto)biographies and movies.

[7] The oil crisis of 1973 had a particularly strong impact on youth employment and housing matters.

within Autonomia on the issue of violence, as some distanced themselves from terrorism. Furthermore, Autonomia was not a clandestine organisation, and its actions aimed less at striking the political class, insisting rather on a defeat of the capitalist system (Scavino 2001). Nevertheless, violent activism spread in the late 1970s and became an accepted form of activism for many members of AO.

1977, memory and the Autonomia Operaia in Bologna

The conflict between the traditional and the alternative left was perhaps most evident in the prosperous city of Bologna, in Northern Italy, the showpiece of the Communist Party in Italy. Any criticism of the Communist government in this city was highly inconvenient and embarrassing, hence the strong reaction against the new student movement that arose in late 1976. Tensions reached a climax on 11 March 1977, when a trigger-happy police officer fired over a dozen of bullets at left-wing student Francesco Lorusso, during clashes between students and police. The left-wing students of the Movement of '77 ventured their anger in the city centre later that day, as they devastated shop windows and tried to reach the local headquarters of Christian Democracy, undoubtedly with similar attentions.[8] Over the next couple of days the university zone in Bologna became a battlefield complete with barricades, until army tanks were sent to intervene, calling back memories of World War II. A large number of participants in the protests of March 11th were prosecuted and jailed, and a climate of tension and mutual distrust persisted for several months, due also to the decision of the public prosecutor to bail Lorusso's killer free on the basis of the notorious *Reale* law. The latter legitimates the use of arms by police forces in situations of public disorder (Grispigni 2007).

Discussions about justice and responsibility, on the one hand, and media images of the clashes and the devastated city centre on the other, dominated the public memory of March 1977 for two decades. During the 20th anniversary of 1997, however, a turnabout took place: former 77-ers tried to shift focus to the *cultural* legacy of the protests, and a highly nostalgic position began to dominate the annual commemoration of 1977 in Bologna. Apparently, the disappearing and downplaying - by official media - of a positive memory of 1977, as opposed to the stereotypical images of the *anni di piombo*, spurred former

[8] Although the ruling party in Bologna was, at the time, the Comunist Party, the alternative left-wing milieu also held the Christian Democracy - which, in a way, 'forced' the PCI to control the student movement if it was to take part in the 'historical compromise' - responsible for Lorusso's death.

participants to engage in a nostalgic revival of 'the good old days', focusing on the more 'presentable' and 'shareable' side of the Movement of '77. This was also because in Bologna the 'creative side' of the student movement had been particularly strong, Bologna having been the musical and artistic capital of Italy throughout the 1970s and 1980s. It was also the home town of *Radio Alice*, one of the first alternative radios that originated after a law in 1975 liberalized private cable television and radio restrictions. *Radio Alice* radically changed forms of communication as it combined political radicalism with artistic elements, placing emphasis on language, communication, and socialisation (Cappellini 2007; Berardi 2007: 290). But the city's cultural heritage had expressed itself in other ways as well: protests were animated by theatrical street performances and musical bands, while the university streets and lecture rooms were covered with creative and satirical graffiti.

In this context, it is not surprising that the Autonomia faction was decisively less violent than elsewhere, and more involved in *cultural* activities.[9] Nevertheless, its place in the public memory of 1977 has been much contested within the former Movement. Conflicts about issues of violence between the different local groups that remained after the conclusions of the 1977 experience manifested themselves throughout the late 1970s and 1980s. Local *autonomi* used the anniversaries of March 11th, for example, to make political statements and claim the liberation of jailed companions, whereas other groups wanted a more peaceful commemoration. This breach was particularly evident during the anniversary of 1980, when AO criticized other groups of the former student movement for linking Lorusso - on a banner for the annual protest march - with a *pentito* of the left-wing terrorist group Prima Linea, who had collaborated with police and had therefore been killed by his former companions.[10]

In brief, Autonomia was slightly excluded from the public memory of 1977 as it was promoted - from the late 1990s onwards - by former members of the 1977 generation. The Autonomia inevitably evoked connotations with violence and the *anni di piombo*, from which the 77-ers wanted to detach themselves. Not surprisingly, one of the most frequently used images in discussions about the *anni di piombo* is that of a young *autonomo* firing at police

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[9] The *local Autonomia* is best known for the *Collettivo Jacquerie*, the independent underground magazine *A/traverso* and the *Radio Alice* group. These gave expression to new needs and desires which were miles away from the classical ideas of a communist revolution, rather focusing on existential desires (291-292) or 'desiring autonomy'. Berardi 2007: 294; Edwards 2009: 74. See also Hajek 2011.

[10] Anniversario di Lorusso. Tensione all'Università, *Resto del Carlino,* 10 March 1980, 6; Baldoni-Provvisionato 2009: 380-381. A 'pentito' is a former member of criminal or terrorist organisations who collaborates with authorities by providing information that may lead to the arrest of other members of the organisation, in return for a reduced sentence. Ginsborg 2006.

forces during a demonstration in Milan, on 14 May 1977, killing police officer Antonio Custra.[11] Focus was, instead, shifted to the cultural and creative side of the movement, a far more positive memory which - through nostalgic recollections - could be made 'shareable' by a wider public, hence creating more consensus on this difficult memory.

Mediating nostalgia

This nostalgia for the failed revolution and lost youth of the 1977 generation was mediated primarily through photography, which thus played an important role in the process of rehabilitation of 1977. Pictures widely circulated during the anniversaries from the late 1990s onwards, e.g. in photo exhibitions and celebrative publications.[12] More recently, the collective sharing of photographs via Facebook photo albums - uploaded by photographer and 77-er Enrico Scuro - provoked a wave of nostalgic reactions by former participants in the movement, who massively tagged themselves in the photographs, left comments and queries and sent Scuro their own photographs to be uploaded in additional photo albums. The photographs have now been published in the volume *I ragazzi del '77* ('The '77 kids', also the title of the online series of photo albums), implying an apparent desire of the 77-ers for the digitized photographs to return to their original medium and materiality (Hajek 2012).

Furthermore, a range of nostalgic *musical* initiatives accompanied the anniversaries of 1997 and 2002, which brought some of the mythical left-wing groups and singers of the 1970s back on stage. Pickering and Keightley (2006) stress the role of music in '[carrying] a powerful affective or sensuous charge' (935), giving shape to that yearning for the world of yesterday from which one has become detached. This is also because music, in the 1970s, was consumed more collectively than in the present-day, i.e. during concerts or in music bars, etc. Hence, reliving a musical experience often means reliving a social practice and experience, therefore regaining a sense of belonging to a group. Experience of time, in the end, is associated 'with the construction and reconstruction of events by the mass media' (922): in other words, we increasingly experience time through the media.[13]

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[11] On this photograph, see the publication *Storia di una foto,* edited by Sergio Bianchi. Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2011.

[12] See, for example, *1977. L'anno in cui il futuro incominciò* (2002), co-edited by former protest leader Franco 'Bifo' Berardi.

[13] Alison Landsberg (2004) stresses the sensuous nature of media that creates memories 'produced by an *experience* of mass-mediated representations' (20, my italics).

This does not only apply to direct eye witnesses of 1977 but to younger generations as well. Visual media of memory, among other things, allow for different groups to share similar memories, as Marita Sturken (2008) argues: 'we all have "personal" memories that come to us not from our individual experience but from our mediated experience of photographs, documentaries and popular culture' (75). Landsberg (2004) coined the term 'prosthetic memory' in this perspective, i.e. a memory that emerges 'at the interface between a person and a historical narrative of the past' (2), implying a world where mass media technologies 'open up a world of images outside a person's lived experience' (18).

Subsequently, these memories may also become the memories of younger generations, who did not experience the events personally but who look to the past for models on which to base their own identity. In other words, nostalgic recollections of 1977 not only serve older generations, in their reaction to the threatened continuity of their collective identity, but are also appropriated by younger generations in want of a political, collective identity. The difference lies in the *progressive* perspective of the latter, as opposed to the backwards-looking nostalgia of the former 77-ers, as we shall see in the final section of this article.

Crash and the memory of Autonomia in Bologna

Memories of Autonomia in Bologna have been reactivated primarily through the squatting activities of a youth collective erected in the early 2000s, on the wave of the no global movement: Crash. Squatting or occupying was the main activity of AO and reflected, on the one hand, the pursuit of solutions to and public attention for serious housing problems in a city coping with a huge student population; on the other hand, it represented a search for alternative spaces of socialisation where to perform what Aldo Bonomi has coined 'fare società', to 'make society' (cit. in Henninger 2006). This refers to the creation of a sense of belonging within an alternative, public and locally determined space, which led to the creation of the 'Proletarian Youth Clubs' that originated in Milan, in the mid-1970s (Balestrini-Moroni 2005).

Building on the example of the Proletarian Youth Clubs', *Crash*'s attempts to construct and promote a cultural youth centre incarnates the ideal of 'making society' that characterized the ideology of the 1970s *autonomi*. Contrary to the groups of the past, though, the crisis of the traditional self that inhabits our postmodern age has promoted a form of 'fare società' not in a territorial sense but in 'glocal' terms, i.e. the creation of 'other places' not

just in opposition to the nation state, but also in opposition to the capitalist world economy (ibid). As Bonomi states, '[u]nder a globalized, post-Fordist economic order, […], no locally grounded agent exists independently of the ways in which that agent is shaped by global forces' (ibid: 184). In other words, it is not purely a local or territorial conflict, nor a purely global one. Making society can then be achieved by creating networks where people 'simulate a community' (186), using the technologies of post-Fordism which so radically changed collective senses of self, back in the 1970s. As philosopher Paolo Virno (1996) observes, nothing unites these groups anymore with respect to the productive process, though everything unites them with regards to processes of socialization: 'What is common are their emotional tonalities, their inclinations, their mentalities, and their expectations' (18). Making society is then not a belonging to a specific group, e.g. a political party, but a belonging as such.

Crash originated when a group of students approached a small number of former members of the local Autonomia Operaia faction, who had remained active throughout the 1980s and 1990s, primarily in squatting activities, anti-nuclear protests and solidarity campaigns for immigrants.[14] Apparently AO represented a 'myth' or model of resistance for these students. How can we explain this identification, and how does nostalgia fit in? Identification occurs primarily on a political and social level. Youth, in the 1970s, was coping with the effects of the economic crisis of 1973. As we have seen earlier on, this led to severe austerity measures which contrasted with new cultural models and subjectivities, resulting in a complete refusal of work and the appropriation of a collective identity which exalted the precarious nature of the new worker. Precarity has grown out to become one of the major social problems in the 2000s, and the younger generations claim it, in a similar way, as a constitutive identity.

This is perhaps not really a matter of nostalgia in the classical sense of the word, where people recall good times with nostalgia, e.g. Americans looking back to the 1920s as the 'decade of prosperity' which forewent the stock market crash of 1929 (Smith 1998: 276). We would then expect *Crash* to look back to the years of the economic boom, for example, if they were nostalgic in this same sense. But theirs is a highly selective and critical nostalgia, a 'counter-nostalgia' if you like, in the sense that they identify with social strata that have generally remained absent from or have been downplayed within dominant, public narratives

[14] De Biasi, P. Personal communication, 3 March 2009; Piccolo, R. Personal communication, 5 May 2010. Both interviewees participated in the Autonomia Operaia faction in Bologna.

of the past, and then try to re-enact or appropriate their battles and their political identities in the present.[15] In other words, theirs is not a purely backward-looking nostalgia, but one which engages with the present and the future, where the past becomes a 'locus of possibility and source of aspiration' (Pickering-Keightley 2006: 937).

In fact, there is an identification with a particular social subject and within the specific context of Bologna: the *autonomi* were young students and student-workers, pursuing an alternative sociality as well as addressing social issues, independently from local Communist authorities. The situation in the 2000s was very similar, and so the group drew parallels between the 1970s PCI and its heir in the 2000s, the Democratic Party and its mayor Sergio Cofferati. In the afterword of a re-edition of one of the key texts of the Movement of '77, for example, *Crash* writes how the history of the 1977 generation is still alive today, and should be a *lesson* for the future: thus they speak of memory duties and 'militant memory'.[16] The close connection between past, present and future is also evident in a slogan reproduced on the back cover of a supplementary CD, which included photographs, video and audio fragments of key incidents in 1977: 'he who controls the past, also controls the future' (275). Two cartoon-like illustrations on the front and back-cover of the CD, which depict Autonomia-like youngsters wearing clothes or carrying flags with *Crash* symbolism, furthermore represent a strong visual identification with the former Autonomia in Bologna.

Identification with the ideological, 'workerist' themes of AO also come to the fore in visual artefacts, e.g. banners and graffiti, in the re-appropriation of a specific rhetoric, in the mythisation of theoretical thinkers, key figures and key readings,[17] and in more practical attempts to affront social issues such as housing and migration. During previous occupations, for example, *Crash* promoted an information service on housing rights.[18] Hence, there is a nostalgia for the experience of the *autonomi* and their 'making society' activities in Bologna in the 1970s, which implies an appropriation of their battles and their political and social identities, though not with the aim of returning to this past: they seem to want to 'recognize

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[15] This falls very much in line with the typically left-wing rejection *a priori* of institutional or national narratives, a sort of automatic attraction to resistance and empathy with the marginalized and weak elements in society.

[16] Autori molto compagni 2007: 274. The book was a 'counter-informative' publication, published in 1977 by members of the Movement of '77. The re-edition, in honor of the 30th anniversary of March 1977, was a joint product of a left-wing publishing house and the *Crash* collective. The afterword consisted of an historical section written by a former AO member, whereas the reflections on parallels between the PCI and the DP were written by two members of *Crash*. Piccolo, R. Personal communication, 5 May 2010.

[17] Books on sale at *Crash* events, for example, generally include works by Autonomia theorist Toni Negri, and several other works on or related to (Italian) 'workerism'.

[18] Laboratorio CRASH! 2007. *Non ci fermerete mai! Frammenti della nostra storia e delle nostre lotte*, 5-6.

aspects of the past as the basis for renewal and satisfaction in the future' (Pickering-Keightley 2006: 921). As Leo Spitzer (1999) observes, nostalgia is a way of shaping and directing historical consciousness, an active and self-aware mechanism of creating memory and identity (91-92).

Their recourse to nostalgia therefore does not imply stagnation but empowerment. This becomes evident if we consider their identification with the violent and radical side of AO, expressed in their almost military behaviour during public demonstrations, in slogans and through dress codes (i.e. dark, military-like clothes). That violence is exalted also becomes evident from the *Crash* symbol: a helmet. Other violent and anti-authority logos such as monkey-wrenches and the A.C.A.B. (All Cops Are Bastards) acronym are printed on merchandise sold during concerts or cultural events.

However, identification with 1970s protest movements also occurs on a cultural level, which perhaps has a more important role in *Crash'*s construction of a collective identity. For these are often relatively well-off young people, from good homes and not always unemployed. Nor do they squat out of pure necessity, and their social activities have a cultural rather than political input. Musical nights are among the most favorite and popular initiatives, for example, with a preference for the typically left-wing *ska* music genre.[19] Commemorative events *Crash* organized for the 30th anniversary of 1977 included a reading by novelist Stefano Benni, dedicated to a comic book myth of the 1970s. Money was spent on the 'decoration' - by graffiti artists - of every building *Crash* managed to occupy. Finally and most importantly, in 2009 the collective reactivated a former archive of the local Autonomia, mainly used for book presentations.[20] The archive was re-baptized 'Dans la rue', inspired by the 2005 clashes in the Parisian *banlieues.* Hence, again there is a certain idealization of violence, which was also visible in a number of graffiti they had made in one of the previously occupied buildings.

This demonstrates that it is not just a local memory *Crash* builds upon in the construction of its political identity, but a 'glocal' one. In other words, an identity is pursued that disposes of a precise material referent, while at the same time associating itself with a global community. Thus, on the one hand, *Crash* appropriates memories of the 1970s in local or territorial terms through the direct appropriation of local, 'physical' and visual memories of

[19] Other initiatives promoted in the past include movie screenings, photographic workshops or creative writing sessions, whereas the group is currently more engaged with the running of an autonomous gym. Laboratorio CRASH! 2007. *Non ci fermerete mai! Frammenti della nostra storia e delle nostre lotte*, 4-8.
[20] Currently, members are also re-organizing and cataloguing the old archival material.

1970s Autonomia in Bologna, such as the old archive, but also by leaving political graffiti messages near the spot where Francesco Lorusso had been killed in March 1977. On the other hand, it identifies with global models of rebellion, such as the protests in the French *banlieues*, the Palestinian resistance, and now also the Occupy movement. The role of the media is extremely important in this: the collective creatively uses visual media technologies during public demonstrations, and extensively communicates via social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. The group thus fully participates in the bottom-up, horizontal forms of communication and citizen journalism which is so typical of our present-day global age, although its origins lie in the many transformations that occurred in the 1970s.

Conclusion

Drawing on previous observations about the positive dimension of nostalgia, 'associated with desire for engagement with difference, with aspiration and critique' (Pickering-Keightley 2006: 921), I have argued that nostalgia is more than a backward-looking longing for the past. It may be so for certain groups and generations, and it is most definitely so for parts of the former 1977 generation. For younger generations, however, nostalgia works as a progressive and future-orientated desire which may provide empowerment. To quote Leo Spitzer (1999) again: nostalgia 'sets up the *positive* from within the "world of yesterday" as a model for creative inspiration, and possible emulation, within the "world of the here-and-now"' (92).

Of course this is a highly selective process, where certain elements are exalted or misplaced whereas other aspects are marginalized or overlooked. There is also the risk of a certain, static and old-fashioned rhetoric being applied almost automatically, without there being any critical reflection. Finally, there is a generational competition at hand, which resulted in a serious conflict during the 20th anniversary of 1977, when young *autonomi* physically clashed with former 77-ers when the former assaulted a book shop during an improvised 'auto-reduction' initiative. Nevertheless, nostalgia is useful and necessary, both for the older generations to hold on to their collective identities in the context of our rapidly changing global age, as well as for younger generations trying to build op their own, collective identity.

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