

IDENTITY AND PUBLIC SPACE

Countercultures are the product of the environment in which they are born, children of their era. Thus, in a world where society has torn itself apart with its own hands—destroying achievements that cost terrifying sacrifices—controversial, nihilistic, and iconoclastic subcultures have found room to emerge, questioning the very foundations of “civil” coexistence, the concepts of decorum and degradation, and the law itself.

In a fragmented and frightened society that responds to an inevitable—and evolutionarily fundamental—melting pot by erecting walls and waving the banner of security to safeguard the last crumbs of well-being, cutting fences, scaling walls, and bypassing sensors becomes a mission with a strong underlying political message. *Cui prodest?* What is the point of all this?

The assertion of oneself as an individual in an increasingly inhumane context.

ERGO SUM. Valerio Polici's first successful photographic project, captures the emotions of contemporary explorers who—in the era of the internet and Google Maps, which render every location close and accessible—find adventure by penetrating forbidden spaces and visiting no-man's-lands, captivated by their decadent charm.

Shot between 2009 and 2015, this series sees Valerio focus on *writing*—a counterculture in which he himself actively participated for years—without giving in to a documentary-style narration of the practice, but rather investigating its emotional core.

Accessing places as evocative as they are dangerous is often the result of teamwork and a high degree of organization: it is the daily reality of *writers* who, within their niche, recreate a social fabric that has all but disappeared in contemporary society—one that prioritizes the goal and safety of the group over superficialities, induced needs, and image.

In Polici's photographs, we find the emotions and atmospheres of those moments, belonging to a community that is simultaneously real and virtual, local and international.

Groups, often organizing through digital networks, meet anywhere in the world to claim trophies such as the Buenos Aires subway or a train in Riga; relationships that one might intuitively assume to be superficial are cemented through shared risk and common goals. Incredibly strong bonds are forged in a matter of days or hours thanks to a helping hand, a couch offered to a stranger, or a plate of pasta prepared by a mother never met before.

Demonstrating the primacy of the individual—of one's crew or group of peers—over the efforts mounted by a society that has mortgaged its values on the altar of profit is a purpose that is not always explicit for those taking part in this modern ritual of exploration.

Capturing all of this requires a significant effort on the photographer's part, as he must immerse himself in the same borderline world as his subjects, sharing their risks, failures, and achievements: once caught in the whirlwind of action, no one can step back from their responsibilities; everyone becomes part of a single organism pulsing in unison—paying for any lapse in attention and leaving no one behind in times of need.

An action lasting only a few minutes requires days or months of preparation: stakeouts, rehearsals, severed padlocks, and cut fences. An action where the moments before and after are just as important and risky as those of the creative process itself.

THE ADRENALINE, THE SPEED. THE CALM, THE STILLNESS. THE LIGHTS, THE ABSOLUTE DARKNESS. HEIGHTS AND DEPTHS.

The opposites that meet along these paths are recounted through photographs to crystallize a portion of the emotional heritage they generate.

Everything has changed since the 1970s, when *writing* meant seeing one's *name go by* and *style wars*. We have now reached a stage where the meaning of graffiti must be sought in the very lives of *writers*—in their obsessive, almost self-destructive perseverance—rather than in their aesthetics.

Valerio Polici ERGO SUM

text by Pietro Rivasi



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It is therefore of paramount importance to capture these moments to preserve them from oblivion and potentially convey them to an audience that will never venture into such situations—an audience that, for this reason, would otherwise struggle to understand a phenomenon that has disrupted, and continues to massively influence, mass communication and the perception of public space.

These are stories of people who recognize no boundaries other than those of their own conscience and energy, sharing knowledge and experience to achieve collective results.

Stories of antisocial individuals who can teach us how to live in community.

Valerio Polici (Rome, 1984)

He began his journey in photography as a self-taught artist, following graffiti writers across Europe and Argentina.

ERGO SUM is an autobiographical documentary detailing that years-long personal journey.

He subsequently attended specialized courses in Rome, Padua, and Paris, and took part in Antonio Biasiucci's Workshop in Naples in 2015. Initially approaching photojournalism, his work was published in major national and international publications (The Washington Post, Newsweek, British Journal of Photography, L'Espresso) before he transitioned toward a more intimate photographic research.

His first book, created in collaboration with Polish photographer Rafał Milach and designer Ania Nałęcka, was presented at Paris Photo in 2016. His works have been exhibited at the Venice Biennale, MACRO in Rome, MADRE in Naples, and the Biennale de la Photographie d'Aubagne in France. He has also participated in numerous festivals across Italy, Germany, Turkey, and Portugal.

