

Conference review

**Keep it Simple, Make it Fast! Crossing Borders of Underground Music Scenes,
International Conference, University of Porto, 13–17 July 2015**

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Now in its second year, Keep it Simple, Make it Fast (KISMIF) is probably one of the largest conferences of underground music/culture of its kind. Convened by Andy Bennett and Paula Guerra the conference, accompanied by the pre-emptive Summer School, was a week-long event with core themes revolving around the many global underground scenes and drawing upon an impressive international range of established subcultural scholars and postgraduate researchers. As members of the conference scientific committee, and as founders of the Punk Scholars Network, we were invited to deliver keynotes at the preceding Summer School, to chair panels and to convene on a number of Summer School sessions, offering ad hoc summative commentaries to those in the panel.

The Summer School offered ‘an opportunity for all students (bachelor, masters, doctorate, post-doctorate) to attend specialist master classes and discuss their research work in seminars’. Its inclusion, therefore, was based upon a clear pedagogical model whereby students could discuss, disseminate and contemplate their own research. More than that, it was also important in empowering students to gain control of the academic arena, often a space solely for the ‘academic’. Here, postgraduate students presented papers that ranged from political activism to urban communities, from aesthetics to mediation, and from identities to authenticity. As an

academic environment, the Summer School beat many a conference: papers were presented in an often-informal basis, with students helping and signposting each other towards unknown areas of research.

To highlight just a few of the excellent papers presented during these few days one needs only to turn to the panel entitled “‘A Different Kind of Tension’: Punk, Authenticity Underground Legacy and Pedagogy’. Here, the topic was underscored by the global, with papers presented from Serbia, Germany, Canada and the United Kingdom. An all-female panel, the topics reflected the breadth of modern research in underground scenes, as summed up in Sonja Žakula’s superb paper on the ‘Separation of Scene and State: The Balkanization of the Belgrade Punk Scene in the Wake of the Wars in Yugoslavia’, and Katie Green’s comprehensive “‘Ain’t a Sleepy Town’: Building and Maintaining a Punk Rock Community in Peterborough, Ontario’. To accompany, Kirsty Lohman’s discussion of punk politics and Tanja Wälty’s exploration of punk women in Mexico City, provided admirable accounts of scene and research.

It was a standard reflected through both Summer School and Conference, as an impressive range of short papers were given at multiple parallel, themed panels, each discussing a number of international, historical and theoretical/ethnographic subcultural practices. More notable papers – amongst the many witnessed – were Vira Vidal’s excellent overview of the US Boston city punk geography and Jack Pitt’s current postgraduate research on punk in the former Yugoslavia. There was also an excellent paper given on the Tokyo free radio movement from Yoshitaka Mori and Tomoko Shimizu. Collectively, the striking observation of these papers lay in their representation of the sheer amount of subcultural research currently undertaken in subcultural studies. Also encouraging was the deployment of quantitative methods to investigate

general subcultural trends and correlations was most welcome in a field largely characterized by qualitative and theoretical enquiry.

Complementing this year's conference were a number of exhibitions on punk art, zines and design practice in addition to film showings, book launches and a variety of gigs. The lunchtime speaking event Rise Up offered short, informal personal reflections on current punk practice from conference delegates, with a striking and informative paper here coming from Simon Le Roulley discussing the personal machinations of Bordeaux politics and transgression. These accompanying events enriched the academic. Júlio Dolbeth's new interpretations of album covers, including Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, David Bowies' *Heroes* and Mile Davis's *Kind of Blue*, was a worthwhile addition to the conference, as was Mary Fogarty and Helen Simard's intervention performances entitled *Sharon and Tracey Exist* and *The Conversation Blows Up*.

Dick Hebdige's Keynote on 35 years since the publication of *Subculture* offered a contextual and informative account of the author's Birmingham life and his involvement with the reggae club The Shoop delivered to a soundtrack of dub. This keynote transformed itself into an incisive and visceral critique of pervasive neo-liberal appropriations of all forms of culture. This was a marked contrast to contentious issues raised in Andy Bennett's keynote regarding DIY culture as a career as opposed to a long-standing radical and political project. The counterbalance to these keynotes were Matt Worley's excellent historical accounts of political narratives in Oi and fanzine culture and Paul Hodkinson's critical and incisive overview of his current work on subcultural hate crime; the latter raising salient questions regarding transgression, difference and social/legal policy regarding the definition and inclusion of attacks on subculturalists as an identifiable hate crime.

As a networking opportunity the conference was excellent. Sitting in the sunshine drinking strong coffee during breaks allowed new friendships and research ideas to germinate. Having said that, there are two general underlying critical points worthy of discussion. One of the general issues arising in the conference was the clear division between those undertaking a somewhat distant sociological (etic) approach to research and those participants currently living DIY subcultural lives both politically and in ideological terms (emic). The former often misreading the latter and vice versa. This led to frequent off the record debate surrounding levels of participation and distance when undertaking subcultural research and who has the authentic right to 'speak' in accurate accounts of subcultural practice. Equally notable was the lack of contributions from current punk (Portuguese) scenes and participants: a notable absence raised by a good few conference members in informal discussion.

Second, whilst the sheer number of papers and participants reflected this growing area of research the short duration of presentations – ten minutes – frequently disrupted the Socratic and scholarly conference purpose. Numerous examples of papers were cut short or hampered by unnecessary technical issues; delivered with lack of clarity and haste due to over preparation led to insufficient space for delegates to critically reflect and comment on some very interesting and lively research. One couldn't help thinking less papers and more time afforded to each presentation would have been beneficial here. That said KISMIF 2015 was a complete success. The sheer organizational accomplishment from Guerra, Bennett and the KISMIF team made for an inspiring and stimulating event showcasing a vibrant, international corpus of exciting subcultural and punk research. We look forward with considerable excitement to KISMIF 2016 with a hopefully increased presence and contribution from the Punk Scholars Network.