

POP MOVES

PoP Moves co-founder Mary Fogarty writes about her performances at the international conference, KISMIF (Keep It Simple! Make It Fast!) in Porto, Portugal on July 15th 2015.

For the KISMIF conference, I conceived two intervention performances, “Sharon and Tracy Exist” and “The Conversation Blows Up” that were created by myself and Helen Simard (my PhD student and a professional artist), with music by Roger White of the Canadian band, Dead Messenger.

“SHARON AND TRACY EXIST”

The first intervention, entitled “Sharon and Tracy Exist”, occurred during the morning coffee break of the conference, after keynote talks by Andy Bennett and Dick Hebdige. We were riffing off of the ways that women with their handbags have been written about in academic scholarship, and marginalized in everyday life.

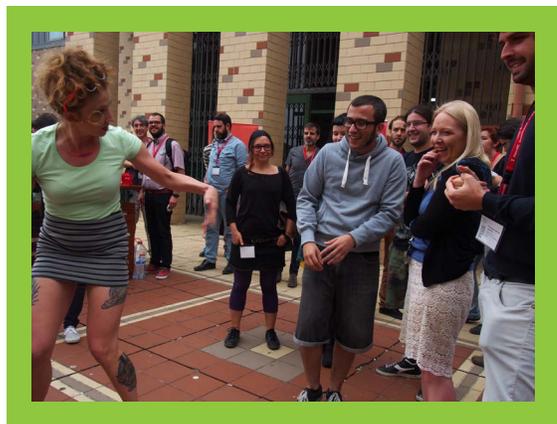
“...handbag in overdrive - the ultimate femme accessory as dance totem”

- Hillegonda Rietveld, London South Bank University

From Sarah Thornton’s classic text, *Club Cultures*, to the work about ‘handbag house,’ particular genres of club music and types of dressing, accessorizing and dancing have been read as ‘mainstream’ and ‘inauthentic.’ Usually associated with white women, and developing from the well-known comic strip, *The Fat Slags*, this performance represents two women who are stigmatized through class and bodily comportment. Tami Gadir caught some of this edge in her description of the work:

“Through ‘Sharon and Tracy Exist’, Fogarty and Simard confronted - in a deliberately grotesque manner - the unquestioningly masculinist and classist premises of ‘The Underground.’”

- Tami G, University of Oslo





The performance involved juxtaposing “Sharon and Tracy” with the majority of the scholars who write on ‘underground scenes’, and who usually wear their ‘subcultural capital’ at conferences and should be self-reflexive about their own positions, according to Helen Reddington.¹

Added to this juxtaposition, this was an intervention/ performance precisely about being ‘in the know.’ As the performers ran around the space, collecting and piling up handbags, and gearing up to dance to a

dance track created by Roger White, “Taylor Shift,” the audience that was ‘in the know’ consisted of those familiar with the academic literature on the subject of handbags. Thus, to understand ‘handbags’ was to be a particular type of cool, developed through educational status and an interest in popular music literature that incorporates considerations of gestures, bodies in clubs, and dancing. Further to that, the performance foregrounded the British-centric organization of the field of popular music studies. To be in the know is to know British scholarship.

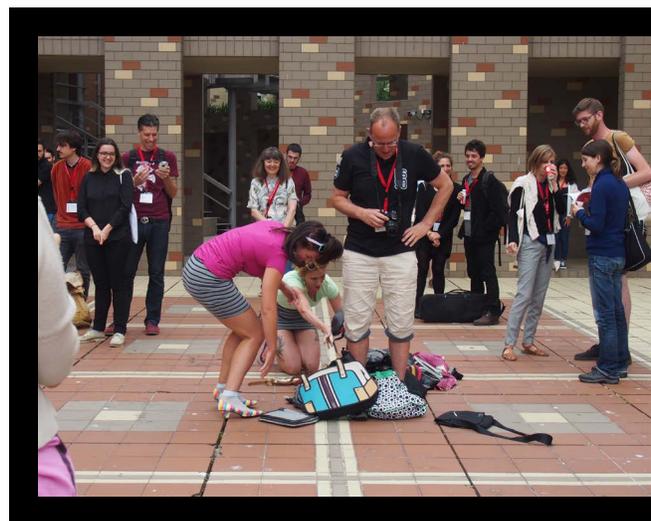
As described by Helen Reddington:

“No matter how much people talk about dancing round handbags, nothing comes close to the awful pang of recognition when you see it happening, especially when it’s transplanted from the dark and hidden depths of a nightclub with a safe crowd of people all doing exactly the same thing, into the sunshine of a Portugese morning.

Mary and Helen, with their predatory smiles trapped an unwitting conference delegate in a nest of multicoloured handbags, working on his simultaneous embarrassment and collusion in the process. This was hilariously funny- but also mortifying as some of those of us who watched it recognised ourselves in their performance.

This brought a fresh dose of reality to the conference, the very unreality of the performance being a critique of the odd academic subculture of sitting around in rooms listening to each other pull lived subcultural existence into shapes it never knew it had.”

[THE ENTRAPMENT OF KISMIF PARTICIPANT IAN TOWNSEND, IS CAPTURED BEST IN A PHOTO TAKEN BY HELEN REDDINGTON FOR HER PERSONAL BLOG POST ABOUT THE KISMIF CONFERENCE!] ²



¹ From Helen Reddington’s talk at KISMIF, “Space to Play: sonic subversion by female punk bands in the 1970s” on July 15, 2015
² <http://www.mccookerybook.blogspot.co.uk/2015/07/snaps-from-kismif-conference-porto.html> [Accessed July 24, 2015]

Additional handbags for the performance were provided by conference organizer and commissioner of the intervention, Paula Guerra. We wanted to foreground garments, as there is less of a gender gap in the employment of women in Portugal, compared to other European countries, because of the Portuguese garment industries.³ And still, there is work to be done on acknowledging the work of women and paying them their fair dues.

“THE CONVERSATION BLOWS UP”

by Mary Fogarty and Helen Simard

The opening of the epic film, *The Conversation* (Copolla, 1974), begins with a shot of a park, where a mime follows people around, imitating their bodily comportment, as a surveillance expert and his team work to record the conversation of a couple they’ve been hired to spy on.

What does it mean that we paid homage to this movie’s iconic opening in the intervention? As Paula Guerra and Tânia Moreira write, in “*Underground Music Scenes and DIY Culture*”: “What is the influence of retro/nostalgia approaches in contemporary artistic production?”⁴

Here we are intervening with a retro-representation of a film about a male protagonist: we’ve multiplied - two rather than one mime, and switched gender - female rather than male. We are not overhearing conversations so much as overlooking bodily comportment, like the mime whose gestures craft the opening visuals to the surveillance soundscape of *The Conversation*, trying to access people’s awareness of their bodies and gestures through movement.

As Tami Gadir describes it:

The shocking experience of individual conference delegates having their postures and movements mirrored by Fogarty and Simard - whose faces were frighteningly obscured by semi-opaque nylon stockings - drew attention to the limitations of our current (bodily) ways-of-knowing, while also gesturing toward the possibilities that such forms of immediacy and presence might afford...



³ As documented by Katrin Bennhold in the New York Times article: “Counting the Cost of Machismo” <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/18/world/europe/18iht-letter.html> [accessed July 24, 2015]

⁴ <http://ler.letras.up.pt/uploads/ficheiros/13230.pdf> [Accessed July 23, 2015]

This is both dancing as an “externalisation of listening”, as recently suggested by Simon Frith⁵, but also as feeling from the inside, as understood by dance education scholar Susan Stinson (1999) who writes:

“dance is not what we do, but how we do it. It is a state of consciousness involving full engagement and awareness, attending to the inside”⁶ (158)

Stinson, whose work gets at the somatic and phenomenological understanding of body knowledge in education systems, is the proponent of a radical, empirical pedagogy. At a conference that hopes to make us aware of our habits of sitting in rooms for days listening to each other speak by adding performance interventions that make us want to move, we saw this performance as an opportunity to invite others to become aware of their kinesthetic sense. But we did it in a punk way...

As Tom Artiss, a conference attendee described it:

“A punk moment that (not so politely) encouraged a self-importance check among attenders was the dance intervention piece ‘The Conversation Blows Up’ by Mary Fogarty and Helen Simard. A looped mash-up by Roger White of hip-hop, classical, and pop served as the soundtrack for a guerilla-style B-Girl performance in the hallway outside the talks, which put the panel chair of an ongoing session nearby in the unenviable position of having to ask that the music be turned down at a punk conference. Any minor irritation this may have caused didn’t appear to linger. Moments like these were, for me, what made the conference stand out. Punk should make us uncomfortable. But we can, if we choose, be comfortable with that.”

The idea of imitating bodily comportment became the foundation for this performance, alongside moments of emotional interaction between the performers as they locked each other into a range of surveillance procedures mixed with full-out breaking sequences. Javier “Jas Processor” Pérez Pinheiro said about the performance, “...[it] was amazing and very interesting performance. You showed all of us how lyrical and intense the breakdance could be.” The piece was set to a musical soundscape by Canadian musician Roger White that looped allowing audiences to come and go and including audio fragments from *The Conversation* and *Run the Jewels* that left the performers on the floor in a pile of their own sweat after forty-five minutes of straight dancing.

MARY FOGARTY AND HELEN SIMARD ARE AVAILABLE FOR BOOKINGS OF EITHER INTERVENTION PERFORMANCE AT AN ACADEMIC CONFERENCE NEAR YOU. CONTACT: MARYF@YORKU.CA

⁵ <http://livemusicexchange.org/blog/what-you-see-is-what-you-get-notes-on-performance-professor-simon-frith/> [Accessed July 23, 2015]

⁶ http://libres.uncg.edu/ir/uncg/f/S_Stinson_What_1999.pdf [Accessed July 23, 2015]

