KEEP IT SIMPLE MAKE IT FAST!

AN APPROACH TO UNDERGROUND MUSIC SCENES

VOLUME 1

PAULA GUERRA AND TÂNIA MOREIRA
(EDITORS)

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6.2. Why it makes sense to speak of emancipation: an overview of futureplaces as a current space for Punk to rise and reinvent

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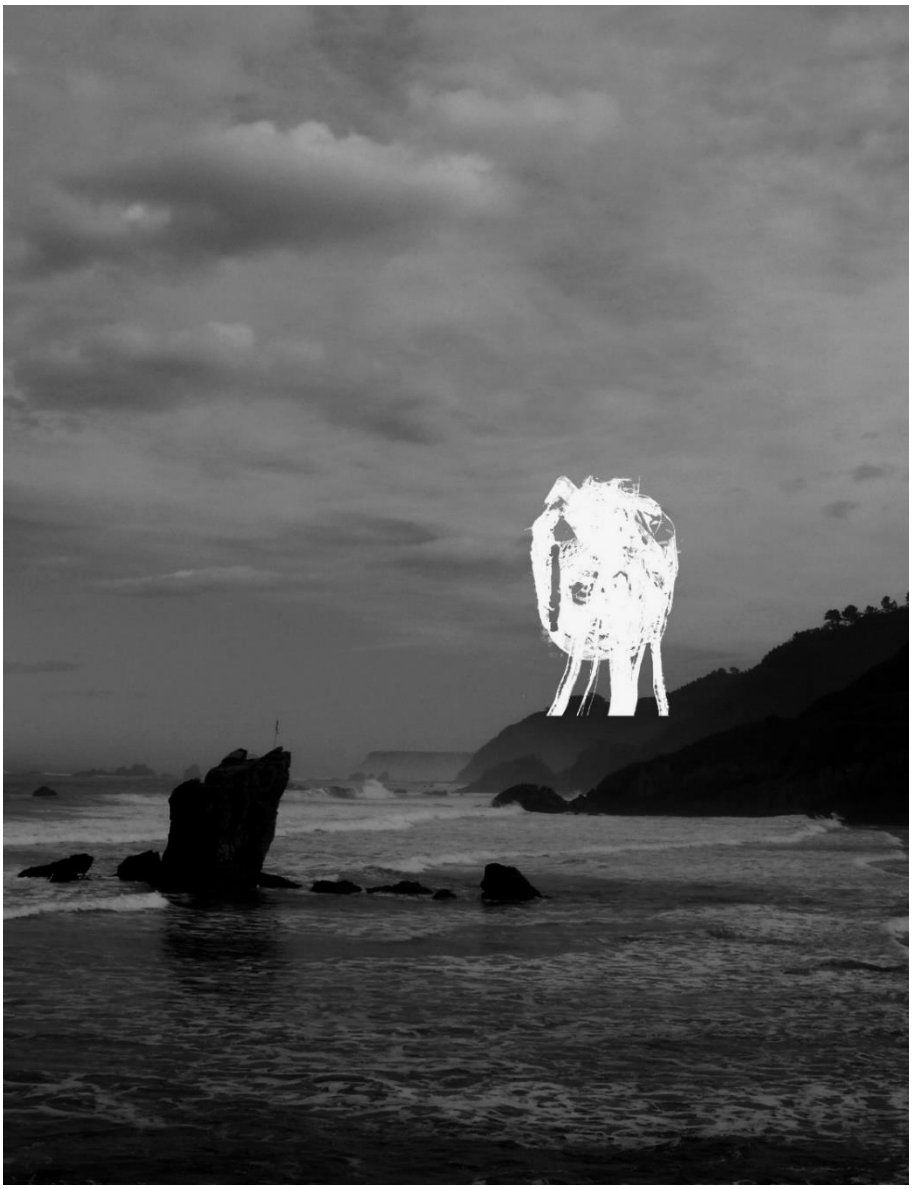

Project website: futureplaces.org

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We begin by positing a perplexity in this day and age: this perplexity is media-driven, and it concerns us. New media seem busy carving a paradox, one where the tacit and proclaimed promise of endless (and endlessly renewable) self-expression betrays itself in a cathedral of algorithmic determinism, a foreboding banality - while maintaining that yes, the Sky is the limit as far as one's existential promise is concerned. The allure of connectivity to the point of a saturated, hallucinatory frenzy knows no nemesis, no redemption: it hovers hostile, half-baked, as pseudo-ontological evidence, seductive bullying. Instant segments of hilarious stimulation, endorphins rather than cognition. Add the ever-expanding spiral of statistical complexity, the allure of "all is in order" in face of the sore evidence that all is not. This vertigo on steroids, this bored expectation to be blown away. This conviviality of opposites, this serene paradox, a paradox that, by virtue of overwhelming presence, no longer formulates itself as a driving existential conundrum: 2014, no less.

No wonder a benevolent anger emerges. The overwhelming, desolate hunch that somewhere, somehow, something went the wrong way… Not so much the acrobatic mantra of economic hubris, as the realisation that cultural emancipation, voided of ideological investment, has become an infantile hall of mirrors entertaining themselves and their opposite. The post-WW2 birth of the concept of Youth, and its vast landscape of possibilities: youth cultures, subcultures, counter-cultures, the will to dream harder, the ability to play harder, transgress, cultivate, reinvent from scratch. The urgency of all this, the nobility, the *gravitas*: the paradox of our times is the evidence that all of these still apply, still live and thrive as narratives, as conscious possibilities - and yet no longer act, they no longer come to be, overtaken as they are by a magical paralysis... Shoved instead to the annals of museography, the cruel status of historical footnote, the peripheral role of a meme, a cute, disengaged cliché.

Let us therefore focus on the deterministic dominance of the template that governs the dynamics of the human fabric. We speak of technological structure, and how it sets up camp in relationships and routines, providing a discreet character. We speak of the unquestioned ruling ethical assumption of how labour is processed, how survival is preserved, how elevation is treasured. We speak of how this template merges, in its birth, with the illuminist roots of science, driving (for the time being) the global scope of civilization. Yet we also speak of reason as an apparently infallible tool - when in truth, it is equally as subjected to untilateral and perverse shaping of agendas. The underlying paradigm of most contemporary algorithmic-based exercises seems to be a deep mistrust in the human. The proclaimed imperative of "smart technology" somehow implies a "dumb user", an individual unable to fulfill the premise, untrustworthy, incapable of self-transcendence if not for the gadget in question, automatism rather than pedagogy; the offer for help becomes an order of compliance.

Even if there was a viable absolute determination for our social, physical and biological complexity, and even if that determinism was applicable to human aspects that transcended circumstance, we would not escape the raw notion that reducing the field of possibilities to visible or probable ingredients corresponds to the reduction of the actual concepts of "possibility" and "future". This reduction serves objectives - ironically, often undetermined themselves. And it has consequences. The shaping of rationales operates discreetly through daily routines, using formats and procedures to produce individual hideouts in the name of collective labour ethics, of survival and elevation. But what it effectively is, is the absence of risk, an exercise of maintenance, inductive ideological immutability disguised as liberation. It's risk reduction through the algorithmic annihilation of the simple idea of possibility, the voiding of proposition, the aversion to prospection - all anchored in the structure of discrete,

apparently inescapable elements, whose ultimate self-agenda is an evasion from the continuous and uncertain physicality of experience.

It's the condition of the constrained word, of the Human held hostage to the reduction that emanates from his/her circumstance. Design as hypnotic seduction to this perversity, science as technical authority supporting alien and indeterminate ends, a radical disappearance of agendas. Creativity a looped reiteration of reduced expectation, a rarefaction of discovery. It is this loss of the sophisticated continuity of difference that generates nausea and demands action, demands a reconsideration of words and meanings.

The exhaustion of words is equally the exhaustion of the means of expression, of social and academic apparatus, of technological devices. The reduction of vocabularies stands in inverse proportion to the field of possibilities. The growing hermeticism of professional jargon echoes the volatile abbreviation of words in social media: LOL, AFAIK, IMHO - an unsurmountable generational gap of codification. Hermeticism further parallels the severe impoverishment of metaphor in informal conversation, as language becomes an end in itself, as the brightness of its *modus operandi* outshines its instrumental condition. The hypnosis of technology has overtaken the Life is was supposed to serve, and now issues command words: magic passwords, as evidenced while overlooking the media-driven constructions of possible Revolutions, just as much as in our small private daily exercises:

Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Youtube, Twitter, Facebook. Like, Comment, Share. Like, Comment, Share. Visceral manifestations, diluted in their own media lexicon. Simultaneous decapitation and embrace, in the very same flat surface. Share. Socio-cultural circumstance sterilised in a forest of papers. Submit. Buildings that contain the city. Selfie. Youth besides the body, youth besides time. Perpetuations of the idea of rebellion or revolution, but not their hard, impactful experience. "Share" as a pure process of statistical amplification, yet perversely willing to maintain an apparent narrative of generosity at all costs. A fatal semblance of Life, an absence of the *Death that generates Life*. Life. Like.

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Futureplaces, incubation of emancipations

Futureplaces is one of the key initiatives of the UTAustin-Portugal program in digital media, and it remains an event deeply rooted in the cultural landscape of Porto. Work began very intuitively in late 2007, around the thought that rather than organizing a digital media festival according to expectations, it would be best to propose an unequivocal focus on socio-cultural impact. This was a means of territorial differentiation, but was also an acknowledgment of the purpose of a festival within an advanced R&D program joining universities, partners and entrepreneurs.

What we did not expect was the magnitude of possibilities to connect with the socio-cultural fabric, beyond the institutional framework. Social promiscuity, we learned to call it: politicians, musicians, homeless citizens, hackers, universities, graffiti writers, NGOs, tech-heads, and disabled citizens. Researchers, DJs, human rights groups, artists, museums, sexual minorities, other festivals, pirates, schools, street musicians, start-up companies, bloggers, activists, security guards, designers and cooks. Mayors, headhunters, academics, media labels, car tuning communities, radio producers, anarchists, seamstresses, entrepreneurs, immigrants, tourists, and people who just happened to pass by. All of the above were and are part of this experiment, and the unifying thread is the simple evidence that these endless crossroads raise the standard of dignity for all.

The experience of futureplaces is an intuitive antidote, a counterpoint, consciously returning to direct contact with ambivalence and the amplitude of Life. It is shock therapy for

nausea and a training ground for possible emergency exits. It configures itself as a long-term laboratorial condition, of deliberately undefined contours: where ingredients and outputs burst as capacitation to autonomous navigation in uncertainty, as a deepening and a renewal of its own experimental factors that may improve this training, and as a focus of small, contaminating particles beyond the temporal and functional circumscription of the lab.

At futureplaces, the rigour and accuracy that are convened are of an existential and visceral nature, and it is from there that they revert to creative activity, keeping technical dexterity in its effective, instrumental place. Actions are critically directed towards circumstances and practices that make us, not with the goal of providing them with a judgment but establishing a fertile relationship with them - whether they translate as a rescuing of the residual or the apparently irrelevant, or deconstructing and provoking paradox to the point of caricature. Affectionate and heritage dimensions, epiphanies of various scales, revelations of the actual meaning of "sharing", sudden images that open up possibilities and readings of who we are. Unexpected (and improbable) convergence of talents, repertoires and sensibilities, bringing down walls that weren't there after all, accessibility of the creative act. An all-encompassing pedagogy of nothing to lose.

The actions of the Lab in its whole cultivate a complex multi-dimensionality that stems from a permanent questioning that drives the process - while feeding its own, ontological condition of mystery. A happy accident, or maybe not, that avoids premature labeling (tagging), that would signal a resignation at the core of its existence. Each practice often emerges without a clear or singular author, alchemic as it is in a dense negotiation between concept and praxis, provocation and proposition, intuition and structure, beyond system, taxonomy or category. And yet, an awareness breaks through in each participant: an awareness of their own possibilities for contribution, of the potentially tangible impact of their own intrinsic capacities. A brave and rigorous experience in the complex and indeterminate, towards effective, intimate change: incubation of emancipations.

Futureplaces is primarily a semantic territory where students and researchers challenge communities and usually end up being challenged themselves. Case at hand: October 2014. A group of non-guitarists - people with no prior experience in playing the guitar - get together one morning. They have never met before, and all know that, in 12 hours, they will be performing live, as guitar players, on a formal stage, in front of an audience. In one stroke, acoustic sensitivity is enhanced, compositional formats are shattered, the concept of a "concert" comes into question, and the notion of "experimental" itself is suddenly a question mark. Someone in the audience whispers: "I so wish I had something to join and make noise with". Meanwhile, a sound recital by 10 non-musicians proves: it is possible. And it is Punk.

Project website: futureplaces.org

And meanwhile, this same experiment is the understandable focus of greed from particular media sectors. A seductive and exotic concept, it will sort out a few seconds of broadcasting, and the channel will once again fulfill its role of connecting with citizens: even if the price to pay is the painful orchestration of the intimate rehearsal of these guitar anti-heroes. It must be shared, disseminated, all working towards a common good.

There are warning signs. Mass communication, talent-hunting agencies, brands in search of the exotic twist of the month. All have performed its own denial as agents of a system supposedly without a face, literally a system of appropriation, of transformation of the intimate, sacred and benevolent into alien hallucinatory entrenchment.

An essential part of the calibration of the futureplaces lab and experience is played outside and inside, between the cryptic and the communicable, between itself and its public image, between intuition and legibility. In other words, futureplaces is itself a territory of conflict. This is also Punk.

Since the early days of futureplaces, back in 2007, the word "future" has ceased its function as a projective space of affirmation, and now carries the ghost of imminent dissolution. We may of course extract the opposite from its operative surface: that the projection was hallucinatory, and dissolution may just be the gift of reinvention. Punk knew better than to hang around waiting for "no future" - it proclaimed the absence of a future as the actual lexical act of its own rebirth.

Johnny Rotten's worn-out jacket, held together by safety pins so it would not fall apart, became an enduring fashion statement, an anti-fluffy if there ever was one. But what matters is not only the reference of the image as emanating urgently from circumstance: at futureplaces it is often a surface of rugged exoticism, an imperative that shelters and preserves the body and its manifestations, immune to appropriation: a cathartic space of sobriety, an emotional absence of fear. It is the necessary shelter for the intimate, rigorous work that demands to be made: a proposal of forgotten introspection giving way to intimate revolutions. Even in this text, what is hereby described somehow breaks apart: somewhere along the way, and in face of the inevitability to share the research, a dense, seven-year-old-and-counting fabric of actions risks reduction, through the desire and the faith of its communicability. And this is Punk.

It is therefore the time to be viscerally aristocratic: not entitlement, but courage; not abandonment, but wisdom; not mannerism, but precision; not mindless connectivity, but generous self-exaction. Futureplaces aims at this throughout its seven-year stream, under the belief that new media are still extraordinary in their potential, yet only able to fulfill their promise in direct relation with our own visceral aristocracy. It seems we're finally getting the hang of it: this is why the word "festival" was dropped - once the territory of collective epiphany, the word is now paved with self-indulgent, hyper-visible consumerism. And this is why we'd rather be a lab, even if to attempt the most celebratory rebuttal of expectations, and in the process, do exactly what needs to be done.

Project website: futureplaces.org

Further reading

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