

WORDS BEYOND THE PANDEMIC: A HUNDRED-SIDED CRISIS

Coord.: José Reis
A collective work by CES

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Centro de Estudos Sociais
Universidade de Coimbra



UNIVERSIDADE DE
COIMBRA



Organização
das Nações Unidas
para a Educação,
a Ciência e a Cultura



Universidade de
Coimbra - Alta e Sã
inscrita na Lista do Património
Mundial em 2013



PROGRAMA OPERACIONAL COMPLEXIDADE E INOVAÇÃO



UNIÃO EUROPEIA

Fundo Europeu
de Desenvolvimento Regional



Fundação
para a Ciência
e a Tecnologia

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Editor

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Publisher

Centre for Social Studies
University of Coimbra

Scientific Review

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December, 2020

This work is funded by ERDF Funds through the Competitiveness Factors Operational Programme - COMPETE and by National Funds through the FCT - Foundation for Science and Technology within the UIDB/50012/2020 project.

The data and opinions included in this publication are the exclusive responsibility of its authors.

ISBN

978-989-8847-28-7

CONFINED LEISURES

Rui Gomes

Those who experienced confinement during the COVID-19 pandemic report a strange sensation in which subjective time either accelerated or slowed down. As if in a fictional time capsule, where movements occur at unimaginable speeds without the travellers being physically aware of the fact. This spatio-temporal disconnect is paradoxical when we think about bodily leisure practices because we have gotten used to perceiving them as the archetype of movement and mobility. Some alternative forms of leisure adopted during this period, especially those involving remote exercise, the use of simulated forms of physical activity, or filling the slowness of time with e-sports, inverted the customary motor logic: movement was replaced by anxious stillness.

On the one hand, the speed of virtual contact with others, whether people, objects or symbols, suggests intensity; on the other hand, the paralysis of confinement produces dejection. The feeling of speed is no longer a feature of the moving body; it has moved to the screens of TV sets, smartphones and computer monitors. Leg speed has shifted to the visual-manual anxiety of keyboards.

The confinement created the conditions for the exacerbation of already existing tendencies, which entered the various fields of life as an extended form of simulacrum and hyper-reality.

The pandemic highlighted the two paths to leisure. The first is the immersion in hyper-reality that defines a material and mental condition of life in which the distinction between the real thing and its imitation is abolished: holiday places that imitate and amplify our sense of exoticism; closed spaces in cold regions that reproduce lush spaces of tropical beaches; exotic spaces that include references recognisable by tourists from other continents; virtual activities without the presence of instructors; mobile applications that replace face-to-face interaction; e-sports designed to give spectators a bigger thrill; confined spaces amplified by images in which you can play golf in a hotel, play soccer in your room or ride a bicycle against wild landscapes without ever leaving your home. That which is geographically distant seems very familiar and that which is geographically close creates the illusion of strangeness.

The alternative path is the growing demand for the dazzling spaces of domesticated nature that were left out of the great confinement: hiking or cycling by the river or the ocean; taking regular exercise in the big lungs of the city, enjoying its public areas. Eco-leisure had already gained followers as a reaction to the artificialism of life and urban sedentariness. With the experience of confinement, it gained a new meaning: the search for reflexive slowness and new cognitive maps, capable of developing new roots in a territory and a place that must be protected as a common asset.