

IN SEARCH OF THE LISBON LAZARETTO

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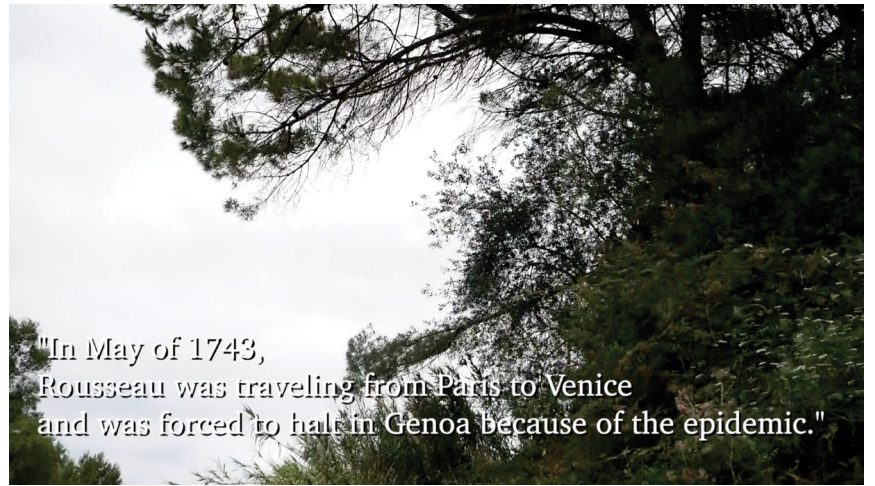
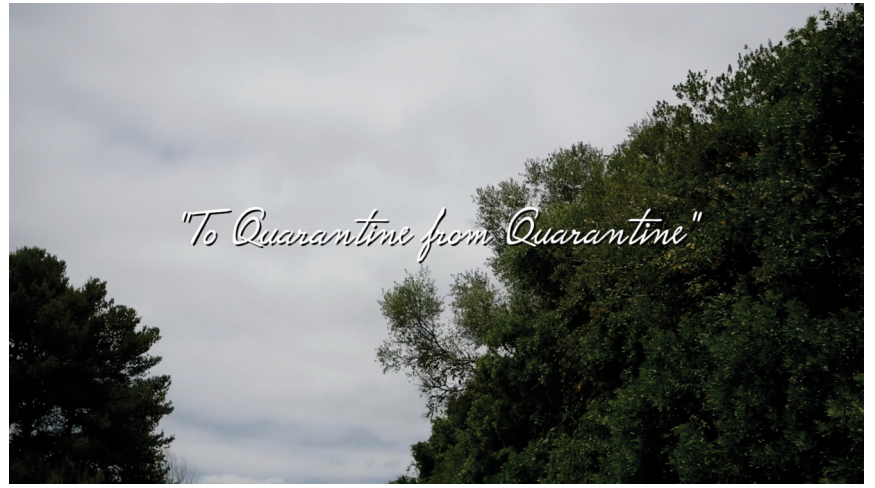
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ABSTRACT

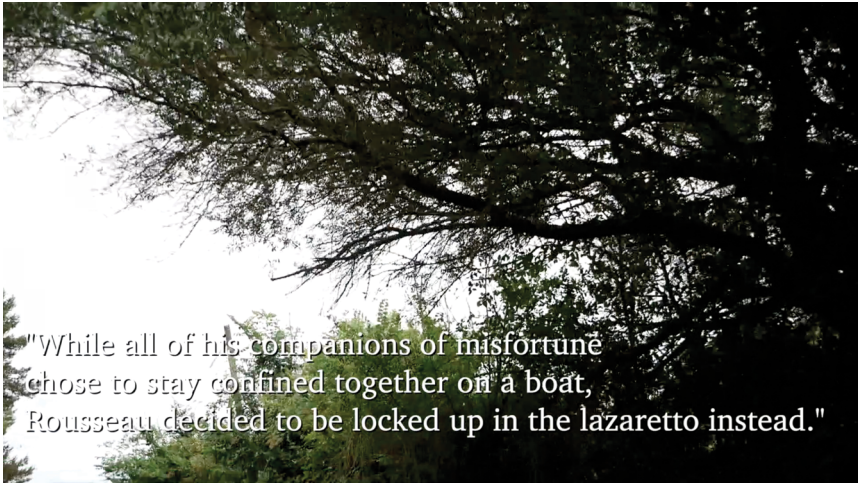
In the moment of the first lockdown, in a double confinement - of the social and the self - a pursuit took place. With Malabou's words and a camera, to search for the Lazaretto was a process to derive and rediscover a place and a moment. A form, as film, as essay. In the open air.

Keywords: Confinement; Solitude; Lazaretto; Audiovisual Research; Catherine Malabou

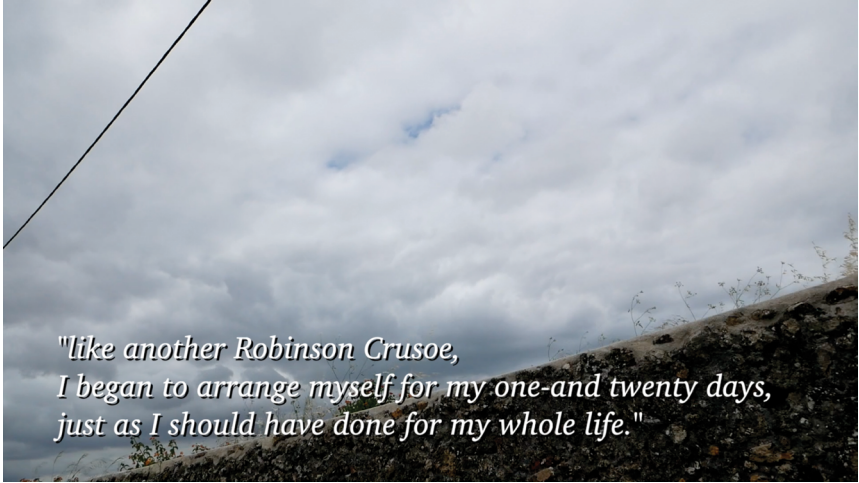




"A lazaretto is a hospital for those affected with contagious diseases."

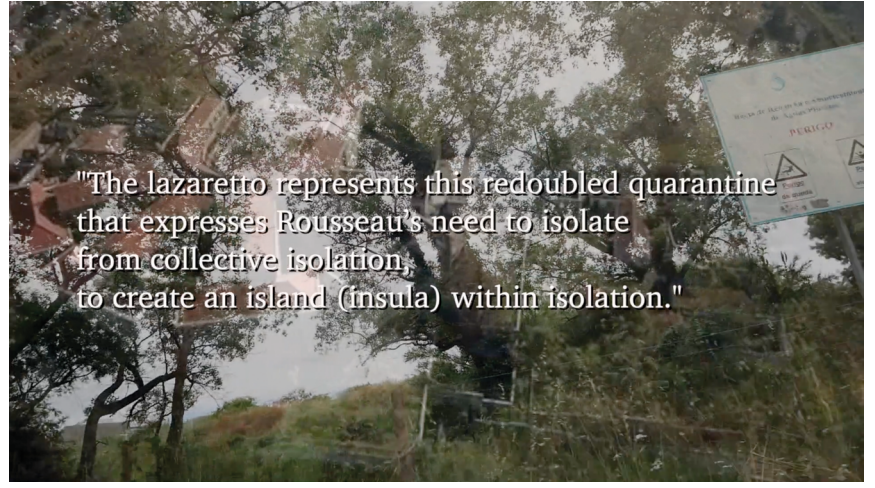


"While all of his companions of misfortune chose to stay confined together on a boat, Rousseau decided to be locked up in the lazaretto instead."

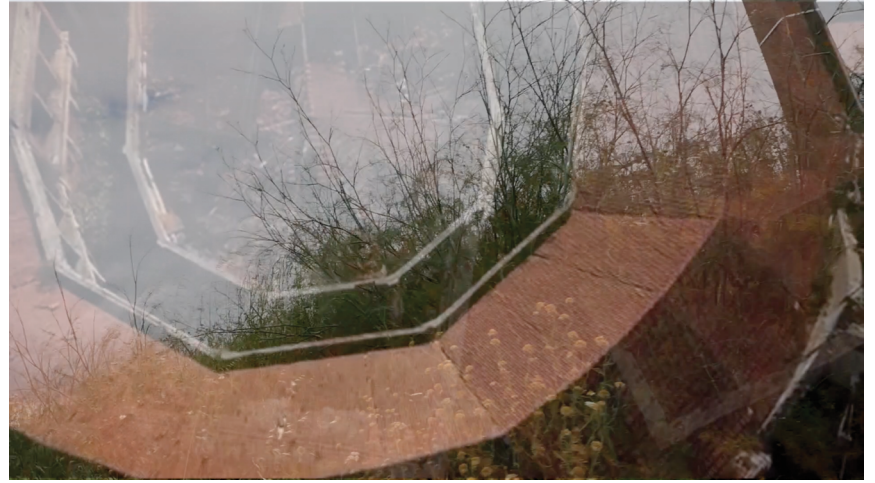


*"like another Robinson Crusoe,
I began to arrange myself for my one-and twenty days,
just as I should have done for my whole life."*



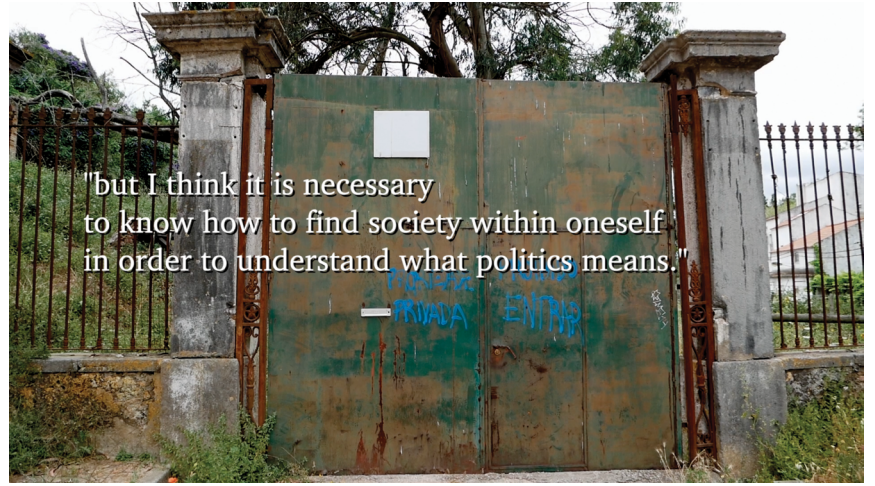


"The lazaretto represents this redoubled quarantine that expresses Rousseau's need to isolate from collective isolation, to create an island (insula) within isolation."











The New Lazareto of Lisbon, where travelers arriving in the city were quarantined, was rebuilt in 1869. It was a young female asylum from 1928 and several families arriving from the ex colonies lived there after 1974. Today it is private property, but remains in ruins, inaccessible from land. It is located in Porto Brandão, on the south bank of the Tagus River.



1 This "small film" has this title because it was part of a set of works created under the initiative "Projection Room" of the Cinemateca Portuguesa, during the pandemic. This set was divided into different sections, one of them "Small Films," where "In Search of Lisbon Lazaretto" was inserted.

A short film¹ that started from a challenge of a text and a moment.

In search of a *place* and of *its moving images and sounds*.

Or a pandemic parable.

If there was a moment of a global need for intellectual comfort, of an attempt to clarify ideas and meanings on a larger scale, it was during the first confinement, in the first months of 2020, at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Quickly, in the virtual sphere, multiple layers of reaction, of diagnosis, of predictions for the pandemic, and under which we still live today, began to appear.

Politics, philosophy, science, culture, ecology, common sense, crossed and multiplied in the media, with endless exponents. There were states of the art, dissections, moral contracts, surveillances and crisis, states of emergency, of gravity. A plurality of voices advanced at that moment, from various quadrants, paths, fields to polyphony, a cacophony.

Viral and mediated saturation.

How to find a place, a meaning in a time of exception, in a stopped clock in the same confined quotidian?

The *moment* and the *text*.

Being told like the rest of humanity to "stay at home" because of the pandemic, I was immediately reminded of this passage from the *Confessions*. While all his fellow misfortunes chose to be confined together on a boat, Rousseau decided instead to be locked up in the lazaretto. A lazaretto is a hospital for people affected by contagious diseases. (Malabou, 2020)

Catherine Malabou's text in "To Quarantine from Quarantine, Rousseau, Robinson Crusoe and I"² brought me the good shape for my own pandemic. Her text on the singleness of individual installation in quarantine. The stripping of self, which was the necessary stripping of me at that moment. Never alone, always alone.

Trying to navigate the end phase of writing a doctoral dissertation, locked at home with my family - each one, a small world - I clung to that text in my final moment. I found how to describe and how to feel what was at stake for me, moulding myself to her words and her thought.

There is something else perhaps more profound in this passage, which is that quarantine is only tolerable if you quarantine from it - if you quarantine within the quarantine and from it at the same time, so to speak. (Malabou, 2020)

The idea of an Other who placed himself in isolation before a pandemic, before an Other who placed himself in isolation before an epidemy, which

2 Schools in Portugal closed on March 12th, 2020, and the first state of emergency was declared on March 18th. This text by Catherine Malabou was published on March 23rd, on different blogs such as In the Moment, segment Critical Inquiry, or Transversal Texts.

reminds him of an Other who isolated himself on an island. A *mise-en-âbime* of us, of various Selves, of the Other, of the disease, of the virus, of contagion.

Catherine Malabou projected the right echo in me.

The lazaretto represents this redoubled quarantine that expresses Rousseau's need to isolate from collective isolation, to create an island (*insula*) within isolation. Being trapped in a boat with a few others naturally generates a sense of remoteness, but remoteness is not solitude, and solitude is, in fact, what makes confinement bearable. (Malabou, 2020)

I imagined Jean Jacques Rousseau arriving at the Lazaretto, the bare walls of the room, of an arid and penal building. The windows and the rustling of the linen, the books arranged as in a library. The trunks serving as table and chair, and the paper, thick, where Rousseau resisted by writing, defying contagion and quarantine: "and, like another Robinson Crusoe, I began to arrange myself for my one-and-twenty days, just as I should have done for my whole life" (Malabou, 2020), wrote Rousseau thinking of Robinson Crusoe on his mythical island, surrounded by exotic strangeness, escape and presence of the self.

What does it mean an I before an Other, before a self, stripped of *socius*?

And before the contemporary, digital, hybrid, saturated *socius*, what is left of the self, confined from the self?

Confinement as an individual place.

Solitude cannot be the origin of society. This may be true, but I think it is necessary to know how to find society within oneself in order to understand what politics means. (Malabou, 2020)

The *time of the text* and the *time of the film*. Several times.

The time of Rousseau who writes himself in a diary, in the passages of his life, projecting an imaginary time, that of Robinson Crusoe, in his *heterotopos* - that of the island - of all of us, closed on ourselves.

Catherine Malabou's time. And my time of her text.

And a third, that of the small film, an audiovisual essay of images and movements in sounds and phrases.

A time that launches itself in a spiral over a future in a camera movement.

Over images and sounds, searching for a place for a *text* and a *moment*.

Such is perhaps the most difficult challenge in a situation of closure: clearing a space to be on your own while already separated from the community. (Malabou, 2020)

The *place* and *its moving images*.

Stepping outside.

There is a Lazaretto in Lisbon³. Lisbon's Lazaretto exists. Concrete and invisible.

On the south bank of the Tagus River, imposing ruins, almost an hallucination.

What happens when we move? The bodies no longer closed on themselves leave the muscular confinement. They add space, trajectory, search. Adventure.

Lisbon's Lazaretto exists. Let us search.

To go through a space. First on a map, then on a screen, Google Maps, Street View. To a dead end.

The Lazaretto still exists in the visual wasteland of YouTube.

The images fly over us. Images of drones that insert it in space. Images that surround it are like birds of prey.

I use these images as ghosts that are diluted in the *travelling* by car, feline movement of the cinema.

This point of non-arrival, the search for an inaccessible place, to travel without being able to arrive at the place of the Lazaretto by land, was also a response to my non-inscription.

There is no accessible way. By land, by road, we lose the Lazaretto, the search remains, the discovery of other confined spaces, houses, a sick cat.

I didn't arrive at the Lazaretto, I stayed at the door.

At one of its gates, conjecturing about the place.

A rusty gate where can be read "Private Property. No Entry".

At the door, looking to other shores, through the bars.

Aren't we all deprived of something?

On the contrary that an *epochè*, a suspension, a bracketing of sociality, is sometimes the only access to alterity, a way to feel close to all the isolated people on Earth. Such is the reason why I am trying to be as solitary as possible in my loneliness. Such is the reason why I would also have chosen the lazaretto. (Malabou, 2020)

The moving images and their sounds.

I couldn't stand a fixed camera, a still shot that looked inwards, that framed any kind of subjectivity, intimacy. A plane in movement is a continuum of life. I was looking for a look that would launch me on a discovery, I wanted an adventure, for two, by car. The curiosity of being adrift, searching, between a journey-plane, journey-camera and a place yet to come, that of the cinema.

Social distance is never powerful enough to strip one from what remains of the social in the distance. Sheltered-in-place has to be a radical Robinson Crusoe experience, an experience that allows one to construct a home out of nothing. To start anew. Or to remember. (Malabou, 2020)

³ The New Lisbon Lazaretto or Asylum 20 de Maio was built in 1868 by António Joaquim Pereira. It was used to accommodate voyagers arriving by sea to be quarantined there before entering the capital. It stands on a hill above the Porto Brandão valley, with an impressive radial structure, now partially in ruins. More information at: <https://www.trienaldelisboa.com/ohi/espaco/lazareto-asilo-28-de-maio/>

The *sounds*.

The repeated sounds of my quarantined daily life. My musical loop. The pieces that my children, on violin and trumpet, also faced in the routine of their confinement. It remains as variations to that time, in my memory, that now this short film travels through *In Search of the Lisbon Lazaretto*.

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