

The Crystal Ship: Lisbon as Lazarean City after *The Impossible*

O Navio de Cristal: Lisboa como Cidade Lazariana depois de O Impossível

CATARINA PATRÍCIO

Centre for Research in Applied Communication,
Culture, and New Technologies, Lusófona University, Portugal
catarina.patricio@ulusofona.pt

Abstract

For a Lisbon inhabitant, a city historically marked by a tsunami, the film “The Impossible” (J. A. Bayona, 2012) reclaims its crystal-image. With the strike of the great wave of the 2004 earthquake, the trauma of the devastated Lisbon in 1755 is reactivated. A Lazarous city, it will now haunt the interval between the actual and the virtual, between survival and loss. It is the wreckage — also that of memory — that condemns us to drift within the crystal-image of this harbour city, we inhabitants made passengers of what Deleuze called “the ship of the dead.”

The hand drew — the wave, the map, and the flooded interiors recalling the phantasmagoric strangeness of Max Ernst’s *Une semaine de bonté*, fragments of “Monday,” the day of death by drowning. And the printer printed — they are crystal-images of “The Impossible”, recalled again near the end of the film (1 hour: 32 minutes), when in the operating room the survivor Maria sinks into the shipwreck of her living-dead body.

Drawing and reprinting are the plastic methods sustaining this visual essay, alongside the principle of montage that situates the crystal-image in its affinity with the anachronism of Benjamin’s “dialectical image.” The aim, therefore, is to show the affective resonance between trauma, repetition, and resistance — a meditation on the time of the crystal-image and how it constitutes itself as the “now” (*Jetztzeit*) of the experience of floating indefinitely between a disaster that has happened and its possible recurrence.

Keywords

crystal-image | Lisbon | The Impossible | montage | dialectical image

Resumo

Para um habitante de Lisboa, cidade historicamente marcada por um tsunami, o filme “O Impossível” (J.A. Bayona, 2012) reivindica a sua imagem-cristal. É com o embate da grande onda do sismo de 2004 que se reativa o trauma da Lisboa devastada em 1755. Cidade lazariana, assombrará agora entre o atual e o virtual, entre a sobrevivência e a perda. São os destroços — também os da memória — que nos

condenam à deriva na imagem-cristal desta cidade portuária, nós, habitantes feitos passageiros daquilo a que Deleuze chamou “o navio dos mortos”.

A mão desenhou — a onda, o mapa, e os interiores alagados a lembrar a estranheza fantasmagórica de “Une semaine de bonté” de Max Ernst, fragmentos de “Segunda-feira,” o dia da morte por afogamento. E a impressora imprimiu — são imagens-cristal de “O Impossível”, rememoradas já perto do fim do filme (1 hora: 32 minutos) quando, na sala de operações, a sobrevivente Maria se afunda no naufrágio do seu corpo morto-vivo.

Desenhar e reimprimir são os métodos que sustentam plasticamente este ensaio visual, a par do princípio da montagem que situa a imagem-cristal na sua afinidade com o anacronismo da “imagem dialética” benjaminiana. Procura-se, assim, mostrar a ressonância afetiva entre trauma, repetição e resistência, numa reflexão sobre o tempo da imagem-cristal e como esta se constitui como “agora” (*Jetztzeit*) da experiência de flutuar indefinidamente entre um desastre que já ocorreu e a sua possível recorrência.

imagem-cristal | Lisboa | Lo Impossible | montagem | imagem-dialética

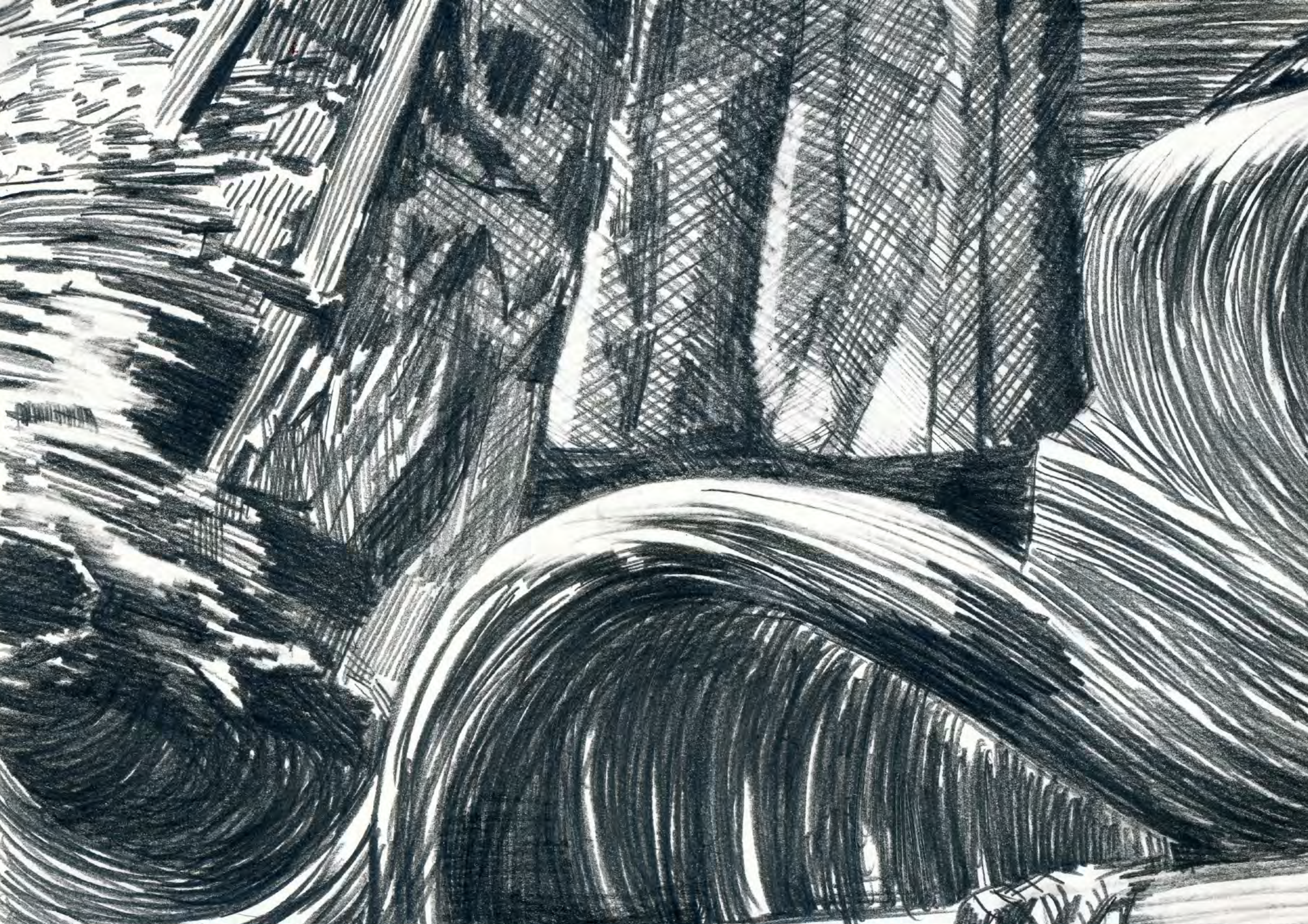
—

Palavras-chave

The background of the slide is a dramatic black and white illustration. It depicts a turbulent sea with a massive, curling wave on the right side, about to crash. Several small sailing ships are visible in the distance, struggling against the waves. The sky is filled with dark, swirling clouds, and the overall mood is one of intense danger and chaos. The text is overlaid on a white rectangular area in the upper center of the image.

The Crystal Ship: Lisbon as Lazarean City after *The Impossible*







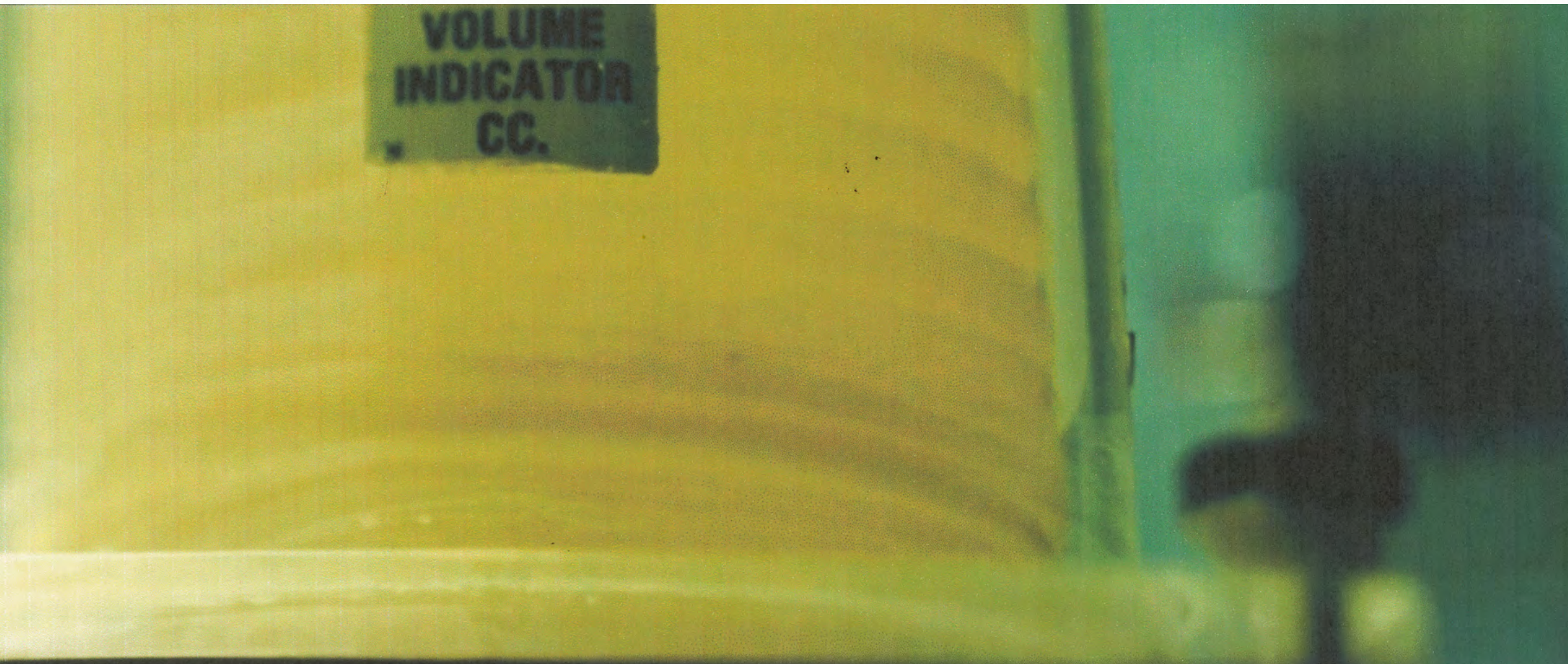
“The ship can also be the ship of the dead,

A detailed charcoal or pencil sketch of a chapel's interior. The perspective is from within the space, looking towards a distant, brightly lit opening. The ceiling is a prominent feature, with a large, dark, curved arch dominating the upper half of the frame. The walls and floor are rendered with dense, expressive hatching and cross-hatching, creating a sense of depth and texture. In the lower right foreground, a person is depicted from the back, their head bowed in prayer or contemplation. The overall mood is solemn and contemplative, with strong contrasts between light and shadow.

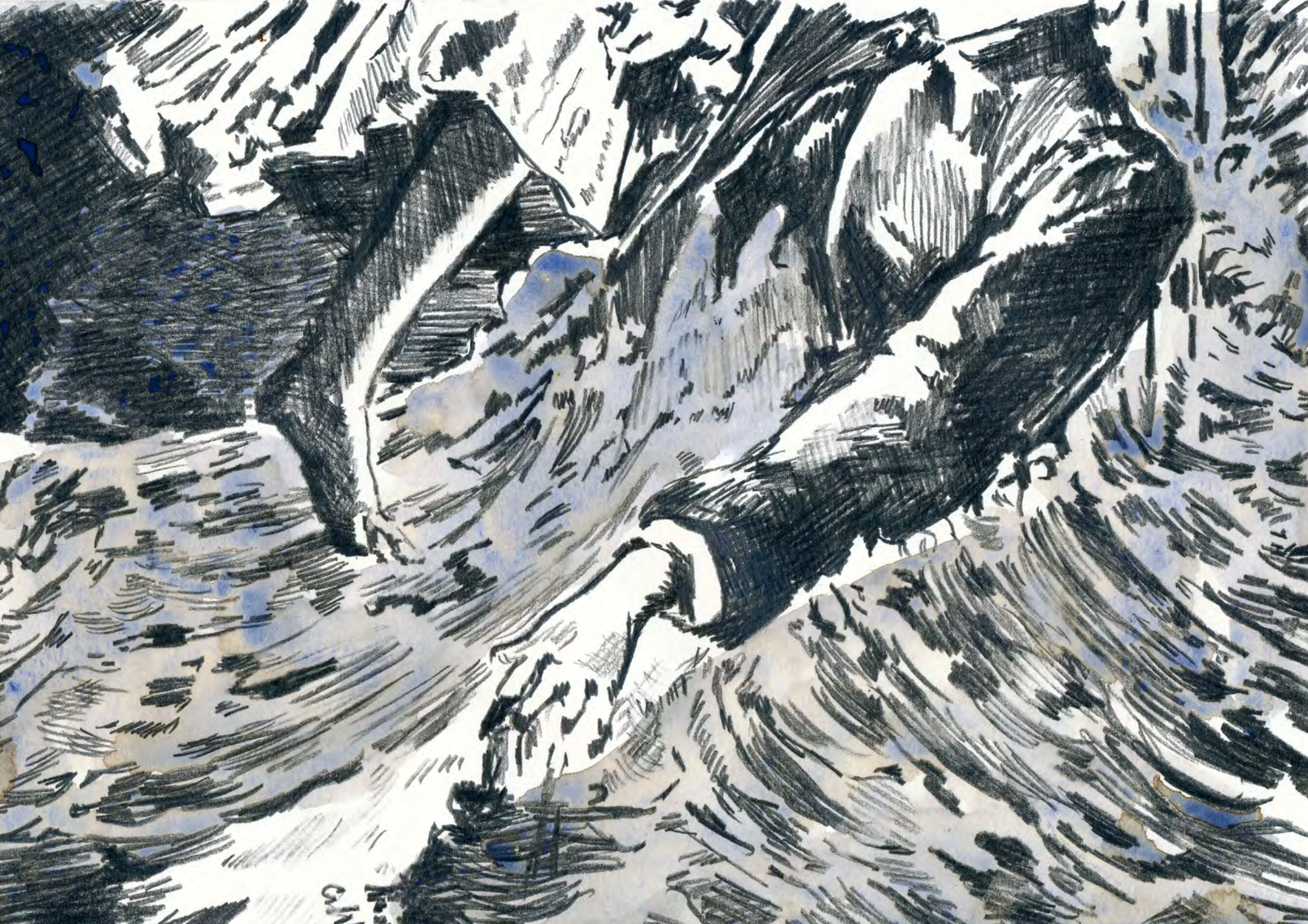
the nave of a simple chapel
as place of an exchange.



The virtual survival of the dead can be actualized,



but is this not at the price of our existence,
which becomes virtual in turn?





Is it the dead who belong to us,
or we who belong to the dead?



And do we love them against the living,
or for and with life?"



Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. London: The Athlone Press, 1989. (Originally published 1985), 74.

References

- Deleuze, Gilles. 1989. *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Traduzido por Hugh Tomlinson e Robert Galeta. Londres: The Athlone Press.
- Ernst, Max. 1976. *Une Semaine de Bonté: A Surrealistic Novel in Collage*. Dover Publications.
- Lo Impossível*. Dirigido por J.A. Bayona. 2012. Espanha/Tailândia/Estados Unidos: Warner Bros. Pictures.

Biographical note

Catarina Patrício (b. 1980) is a Visual Artist and Assistant Professor at ECATI, Lusófona University. She holds a Ph.D. in Communication Sciences from FCSH-NOVA (2014), an M.A. in Anthropology of Social Movements from FCSH-NOVA (2008), and a Bachelor's degree in Painting from the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Lisbon (2003). Catarina Patrício's research interests span Anthropology, Artistic Practices, Aesthetics, Contemporary Culture, Media Archaeology and Philosophy of Technics. She is an integrated researcher at CICANT - Center for Research in Applied Communication, Culture and New Technologies. Her doctoral and post-doctoral research were funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT). Catarina Patrício regularly publishes essays and exhibits artwork, contributing to the fields of visual arts and Media Studies.

ORCID

[0000-0002-1904-2775](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1904-2775)

CIÊNCIA ID

[2318-6DDC-9A92](https://ciencia.id.ocp.pt/2318-6DDC-9A92)

Institutional address

Campo Grande, 376, 1749-024 Lisboa, Portugal.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this visual essay.

To cite this visual essay

Patrício, Catarina. 2025. "The Crystal Ship: Lisbon as Lazarean City after The Impossible."
Revista de Comunicação e Linguagens (63): 224-250. <https://doi.org/10.34619/kpow-uzwx>.

Received Recebido: 2025-05-20

Accepted Aceite: 2025-11-27

© 2025 Catarina Patrício. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.