



## PAUSE YOUR EYES AT THE CLOTHESLINE AND MAKE IT A "PLACE" (TUAN STYLE)

On sunny days like this, hanging on external clotheslines, with cord or wire, more or less improvised, freshly washed pieces dry in the sun and wind. Trousers, sweaters, towels, towels ...arranged in a meticulous and balanced order, attentive to the strength and direction of the wind, as well as the incidence of the sun. There is a whole art of harmonizing the clothes of a family on the same rope.

We can read this gesture as an index of a careful and rigorous physical effort made by those who extended the clothes, in general women, and as the material result of a socio-cultural grammar, inside and outside the home, and public and private moralities.

Let's look at the details. You have to know how to dry your clothes in public. There is a whole sense of well extending the clothes, as well as washing and tidying. Based on a visual ethnography of clothing care practices in British homes, social scientist Sarah Pink (2007) shows how domestic activities respond to women's need to create a "house or a home and to constitute their own femininities and implied moralities.

Paying attention and dealing with the trivial or barely visible details of the daily experience of urban life is part of the tasks that the platform of art and urban culture (Passeio) of the Center for Communication and Society Studies (CECS) has taken as its own. It is based on the assumption that the insignificant gives us keys and clues to identify, interrogate and link small reports of daily life with broader processes and social worlds. This task — shows the extensive research

that responds to this desideratum, as developed, for example, by the historian de Certeau and the philosopher Lefebvre — requires imagination and the adoption of a sensitive attitude to making strange habitual ways of experiencing objects, environments and events, activities and social and motivating simultaneously the curiosity to look at familiar things in more open and receptive way. Instead of being guided by a look with pragmatic concerns, which tend to dominate in daily life, we suspend this kind of concern to experience urban everyday life in a disinterested and not pragmatic way.

The essayist Georges Perec asks in his work *L'infra-ordinaire* (1989, pp. 18-19) how to talk about these common things, what exists, what we are, the “infra-ordinary”, what escapes the radar of the busy daily press focused on the scandalous and the extraordinary.

Following this inspiration, the clothesline is no longer evident, a natural object, and becomes the target of interest and curiosity in its particularities. In this micro essay I let myself be challenged by clotheslines placed on the outside of windows, on the balconies and even in the public space, with which I find myself walking through the streets of the city of Braga. It is a mundane object that those who walk through these streets expect to see, even if unconsciously. At the same time, the repeated encounter with clotheslines drying on the facades of the buildings renews and sediments the common idea that they are part of the urbe.

The historical (personal and collective) memories of Portuguese cities, and their traditional or “picturesque” semiotic landscapes, surely include the strings on the windows with washed clothes to dry. In different urban imaginaries (Silva, 1992), this image is associated with the countries of Southern Europe and, in general, with the countries of the global South. This association is also fed by the discursive constructions offered by diverse artistic practices that participate in the way each city is made. Recently Mr Dheo, urban artist, materialized the image of the clotheslines and its poeticity in a mural, at the top of the *Escadaria dos Guindais*, between someone who extends clothes in an aligned way and the roses and camellias of the gardens, “so that Porto would be even more proud of its identity, refers the artist in an interview with *Ágora do Porto* (Reis, 2023).

It was perhaps this kind of pride that mobilized, in 2019, the population of the cities of the Croatian coast against the prohibition of drying clothes abroad and in defense of the *Tiramoli* or clotheslines. And that can motivate intercultural “conflicts”, in a propitious context, as reported by the RFM in 2022 (*Polish tourist criticized the Portuguese for extending clothes on the street and was attacked. Everything happened on social networks, where the tourist made a publication asking for a law that prohibits the Portuguese from extending their clothes on the street*).

In addition to the symbolic cultural and national identity potential, and the poetic element that the colourful clothes flying in the wind update or make present, especially for those who see, interpret and experience the city by walking, it is matters the ways in which domestic practices of hanging clothes in urban areas are able to produce changing



material realities and alternatives to those planned in urban policies, with undeniable environmental benefits. Inventiveness, Lebevre (1961) and de Certeau (1980) tell us, is an integral part of the manufacture of everyday life.

In the cities of the global South, the luxury of sufficient water supply and the use of washing machines is still a privilege of a few, as well as of drying machines. In its material aspect, to extend the clothes on the clothesline is to use a space to dry the freshly washed clothes, the most economical way to fulfill the lack of other means. Often dwellings do not have a space intended for this task and have little sunlight inside. Those who inhabit them resort to various inventive strategies to respond to these needs, prolonging the interior space to the outside or, in other words, producing an intermediate space, an *inbetween* space which reconciles or connects the public and the private.

These strategies can be sustained in the articulation between neighbors and in the construction of a certain notion of community (Roquefort & Medina, 2021). It is not by chance that Deco, the “largest consumer organization” in Portugal, in its online space dedicated to condominiums, includes a set of recommendations on the subject: *Conflicts with clotheslines: how to solve?*

From a more positive point of view, which draws our attention to the American philosopher Yuriko Saito (2017) in her *Aesthetics of Everyday Family Life*, the clothes we see drying in the windows, often associated with poverty, impoverished city areas and migrant populations, gives a sense of humanity and fragility to an environment that would be uniform and rigid, were it not for this presence of these objects. At the same time, the clotheslines can be read as signs of the resilience and dignity of those who live in these spaces, despite the unimaginable difficulties. They also serve to feed feelings of neighborhood and sensations that we associate with the idea of home. I recall in this regard the use that Coletivo Pátio, “a collective of creatives”, makes of the metaphor of the *Estendal* to designate the itinerant festival of short films organized by them “to celebrate neighborhood life and spread cinema across these stretchers outside”.

The aesthetic and political potential of extended clothing in urban contexts underlined here clashes with the dominant punitive attitude in the global North, despite the clear environmental benefits of this practice and the proliferation of slow living movements in these countries. An ideal that seems to combine with the slowness necessarily involved in the activity of stretching clothes and picking them up (and folding), and eventually with the time needed to appreciate the beauty of what changes in the daily routine of extending clothes — the seasons, meteorology, colors, clothes — as Laura, one of the participants in an empirical study on the presence of beauty in the management of everyday life, made by Paullina Rautio (2009), in the field of education, writes in her letters.

But faced with these environmental and therapeutic benefits, it is social conventions, and associated moral judgments, that still seem to dominate the way consumers in the global North deal with domestic washing (Klint, Johansson & Peters, 2023). Reasons that may also help explain why domestic laundry practices have received little attention from

urban planners, despite their centrality in everyday urban life. It will not be by chance that the idiom airing your dirty laundry in public is used to criticize the public display of details that should remain private. The existing research on the history of this mundane object, and associated practices, shows how they are linked to changes in the position of women, at home and abroad (Lupton, 1993; Van Herk, 2002), which interweave with class relations and social-spatial relations (Watson, 2015).

**Zara Pinto-Coelho**

**Braga, 29 de março de 2024**

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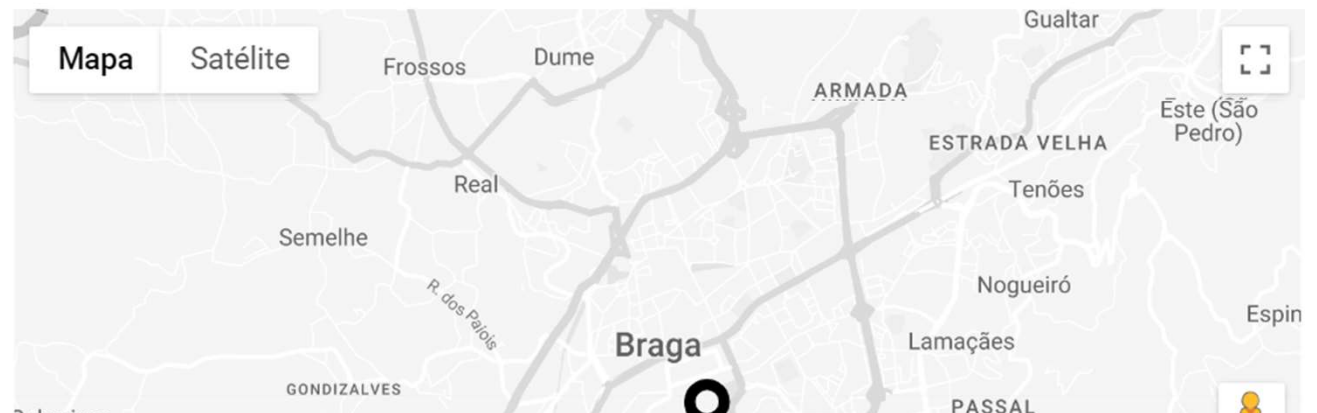
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