



INTERSELF INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE

# Consciousness & Embodied Selfhood in Biological and Artificial Agents

21-22

OCTOBER 2024

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WEBSITE



## PROGRAM AND ABSTRACTS



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# Program

Monday, October/21/2024	
Morning session	
09:00 - 09:30	Welcome & Registration
09:30 - 10:00	Opening remarks: Anna Ciaunica
10:00 - 10:40	Stephen Fleming (UCL, London) - <b>Sensory horizons and the functions of conscious vision</b>
10:40 - 11:00	Celina Schadow (Humbolt University Berlin) - <b>Coming home: An Existential and Embodied Approach to explore Depersonalization Experience</b>
11:00 - 11:30	Coffee break
11:30 - 12:10	Anna Ciaunica (University of Lisbon, UCL London) - <b>From Cells Selves: Coupling Neuron and Immune Cellular Biological self-Organizing Systems</b>
12:10 - 12:30	Altea Vanni (University of Lisbon) - <b>(Dis)Embodied Sense of Agency in Human/Artificial agents interactions</b>
12:30 - 14:30	Lunch break
Afternoon session	
14:30 - 15:10	Shunichi Kasahara (Sony Computer Science Laboratories, Inc. / OIST Japan) - <b>Cybernetic Humanity: Exploring the new humanity emerging from the integration of humans and computers</b>
15:10 - 15:30	Michael Bennett (ANU School of Computing) - <b>Why Is Anything Conscious?</b>
15:30 - 16:00	Coffee break
16:00 - 16:40	Mehdi Khamassi (ISIR, Paris) - <b>Uncertainty, non-stationarity and context in world models for robots</b>
16:40 - 17:20	Catherine Pelachaud (ISIR Paris) - <b>Embodiment, Interaction, Adaptation</b>
17:20 - 18:00	Round table
19:30 - 21:30	Social diner

## Tuesday, October/22/2024

### Morning session

10:30 - 11:00	Welcoming and Registration
11:00 - 11:40	Antonia Hamilton (UCL, London) - <b>Seeing with and being seen – visual perspective taking in with real humans and artificial agents</b>
10:00 - 10:20	Dwaynica Greaves (UCL, London) - <b>Measuring the sense of self and interpersonal coordination of professional actors in real-world environments</b>
12:30 - 14:30	Lunch break

### Afternoon session

14:30 - 15:10	Art Pilacinski (Ruhr University Bochum) – <b>Looking at concepts: Neural underpinnings of non-visual eye movements during thinking</b>
15:10 - 15:30	Veronika Alekseeva (CIMEC, University of Trento) - <b>One Step Closer to my Heart: Cardiac Cycle is Coupled with Footsteps in Typical but not in Depersonalisation Individuals</b>
15:30 - 16:00	Coffee break
16:00 - 16:40	Benoît Bardy (University of Montpellier) - <b>How moving in unison enhance social interaction with human and artificial agents.</b>
16:40 - 17:40	<u>Poster session</u>
17:40 - 18:20	Sylvia Rijmer (Superior School of Dance-IPL, Lisbon) & Cláudia Sevivas (IADE - Creative University) - <b>BODILY FUTURES: DANCE and AI</b>
18:20 - 19:00	Greetings & Closing remarks

# Abstracts

Monday, October 21st 2024

## *Sensory horizons and the functions of conscious vision*

**Stephen Fleming (UCL, London)**

### **Abstract:**

It is not obvious why we are conscious. Why can't all of our mental activities take place 'in the dark'? What is consciousness for? In my talk I will attempt to answer this question focused on conscious vision. I will review evidence on the timescale of visual consciousness, showing that it is surprisingly slow: postdictive effects reveal windows of unconscious integration lasting up to 400 ms. If consciousness is slow, it cannot be for online action-guidance. Instead, conscious vision evolved to support offline cognition. In joint work with Matthias Michel, I trace the emergence of conscious vision to the water-to-land transition, where larger terrestrial sensory horizons allowed animals to benefit from model-based planning of the sort that is associated with consciousness in humans. This shift drove the evolution of "reality monitoring"—the capacity to distinguish between internally and externally generated signals. Following higher-order theories of consciousness, we associate consciousness with this reality monitoring function and discuss novel empirical predictions. I will describe ongoing empirical work on value-based construal and perceptual reality monitoring that seek to test aspects of this account using the tools of cognitive neuroscience.

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## *Coming home: An Existential and Embodied Approach to explore Depersonalization Experience*

**Celina Schadow** (Humbolt University\_Berlin)

### **Abstract:**

From the start of life, even before birth, we sense, move, and interact with our environment. Through childhood and beyond, we gradually appropriate the world around us. Our experiences evolve through interaction, shaped by our movement and actions. This process builds familiarity and trust in ourselves, others, and our surroundings, giving us a sense of being "at home." Human life evolves in ever-changing circumstances, making our sense of "home" vulnerable. Limit situations such as great stress, trauma, or upheaval can question our sense of safety and our trust and familiarity, draining meaning from our surroundings and giving rise to psychopathologies in the attempt of defense.

Depersonalization (DP) is a condition characterized by a distressing sense of detachment from oneself, the body, and the world. It is considered a protective defense mechanism and can be triggered by stress, trauma, depression, or drug use. Those affected may feel unreal, trapped inside their heads, viewing life from a third-person perspective. Familiarity and trust are replaced by detachment, alienation, and uncanniness—a feeling of not being "at home." Despite its high prevalence and severe distress, the underlying mechanisms of DP and effective interventions remain poorly understood.

This study emphasizes that the moving body is central to a sense of "home" and that this lost connection can be restored through the characteristics of our initial appropriation—through sensing, movement, and action. It will explore the effects of synchronizing bodily movements (cardiac rhythm) and actions (walking) using real-time sensory feedback to increase the sense of embodiment, expressed in taking the first-person perspective. Returning to this perspective is a step towards restoring familiarity and trust—to return "home." The findings may contribute to more dynamic, embodied therapeutic approaches for depersonalization.

## ***From Cells to Selves: Coupling Neuronal and Immune Cellular Processing in Biological self-Organising Systems***

**Anna Ciaunica** (University of Lisbon, UCL London)

### **Abstract:**

Significant efforts have been made in the past decades to understand how mental and cognitive processes are underpinned by neural mechanisms in the human brain and biological systems. Here I argue that a promising way forward in understanding the nature of human cognition is to zoom out from the prevailing picture focusing on its neural basis. I consider instead how neurons work in tandem with other type of cells (e.g. immune cells) to subservise biological self-organisation and adaptive behaviour of the human organism as a whole. I focus specifically on the immune cellular processing as key actor in complementing neuronal processing in achieving successful self-organisation and adaptation of the human body in an ever-changing environment. The focus on cellular rather than neural, brain processing underscores the idea that adaptive responses to fluctuations in the environment require a carefully crafted orchestration of multiple cellular and bodily systems at multiple organisational levels of the biological organism. Hence cognition can be seen as a multiscale web of dynamic information processing distributed across a vast array of complex cellular (e.g. neuronal, immune, and others) and network systems, operating across the entire body, and not just in the brain. Ultimately, this talk builds up towards two radical claims. First, there is the idea that cognition should not be confined to one system alone, namely the neural system in the brain, no matter how sophisticated the latter notoriously is. Second, I outline the role of co-embodiment – i.e. human bodies and brains developing within another human body, in utero – as a key factor in scaling up cognitive processing across the lifespan. Ultimately, the aim is to show that paradoxically, in order to understand what makes our cognition uniquely human, we need to focus on what we have in common with and not on what what sets us apart from other biological systems. I then discuss potential implications for contrasting human versus artificial systems in relation to brain-body-environment interactions.

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## ***(Dis)Embodied Sense of Agency in Human/Artificial agents interactions***

**Altea Vanni** (University of Lisbon)

### **Abstract:**

The sense of agency – i.e. the feeling of being in control of one’s bodily actions – is a fundamental aspect of the human mind. Previous work showed that the Joint sense of agency (JSOA) – the sense of control experienced by humans when acting with others – depends on the type of embodied agent we are acting with (Sahai et al., 2023). However, the effect of interacting with human versus artificial bodies on the human body remains an open question. Here we investigate the effect of Depersonalisation (DP) – a condition that makes people feel detached from their self and body – on embodied joint agency in Human/Human versus Human/Artificial others dyads.

To this end, we have designed the Joint Simon Task in VR where participants with High versus Low Levels of DP can embody either a Human avatar or a Social Humanoid Robot ‘Pepper’ avatar.

We suggest that the sense of agency may be influenced by the (dis)connection from one’s own body and self. Individuals experiencing High versus Low levels of DP might engage differently with Social Humanoid Robot ‘Pepper’ as co-agent. Experiencing High levels of DP may evoke a stronger sense of joint agency when interacting with robotic avatars rather than human ones. Depersonalisation disconnection from one’s bodily experience can lead to an unsettling realization—a sensation of detachment, “feeling like an *automata*”. A better understanding of how feelings of being (dis)connected from one’s body impacts the way people feel (dis)connected from human and artificial others may help us better design human/artificial agents’ interactions.

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## ***Cybernetic Humanity: Exploring the new humanity emerging from the integration of humans and computers***

**Shunichi Kasahara** (Sony Computer Science Laboratories, Inc. / OIST Japan)

Abstract:

When humans integrate with computers, to what extent are we still ourselves? Computers are no longer just tools for humans, but are deeply intervening in our bodies and behavior. When humans integrate with computers and acquire abilities and different bodies beyond what we currently possess, how do we define our own humanity? I am researching “Cybernetic Humanity,” which is a new concept of humanity that emerges from the integration of humans and computers, through the intersection of computer science and human science. My talk will include 1) action in the human-computer integration, 2) body in virtual reality and 3) identity of the face in human-AI integration. Then I will discuss dynamics of humanity that are woven by the integration of humans and computers.

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## ***Why Is Anything Conscious?***

**Michael Bennett** (ANU School of Computing)

Abstract:

We tackle the hard problem of consciousness taking the naturally-selected, self-organising, embodied organism as our starting point. We provide a mathematical formalism describing how biological systems self-organise to hierarchically interpret unlabelled sensory information according to valence and specific needs. Such interpretations imply behavioural policies which can only be differentiated from each other by the qualitative aspect of information processing. Selection pressures favour systems that can intervene in the world to achieve homeostatic and reproductive goals. Quality is a property arising in such systems to link cause to affect to motivate real world interventions. This produces a range of qualitative classifiers (interoceptive and exteroceptive) that motivate specific actions and determine priorities and preferences. Building upon the seminal distinction between access and phenomenal consciousness, our radical claim here is that phenomenal consciousness without access consciousness is likely very common, but the reverse is implausible. To put it provocatively: Nature does not like zombies. We formally describe the multilayered architecture of self-organisation from rocks to Einstein, illustrating how our argument applies in the real world. We claim that access consciousness at the human level is impossible without the ability to hierarchically model i) the self, ii) the world/others and iii) the self as modelled by others. Phenomenal consciousness is therefore required for human-level functionality. Our proposal lays the foundations of a formal science of consciousness, deeply connected with natural selection rather than abstract thinking, closer to human fact than zombie fiction.

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## ***Uncertainty, non-stationarity and context in world models for robots***

**Mehdi Khamassi** (ISIR, Paris)

Abstract:

An important current challenge for reinforcement learning (RL) robots is to learn world models to predict the effect of their actions and plan in a diversity of situations. One major difficulty in this context is to automatically detect when the same action results in uncertain effects, or in distinct effects in different contexts. This prompts to learning distinct world models and switching between them depending on the context. This can be useful for both non-social tasks (navigation, object manipulation) and social tasks (where other agents' behavior can differ between contexts).

In this talk, I'll present a series of robotics experiments for learning and switching between world models depending on the context. I'll illustrate how non-stationarity and change point detection can be approached in terms of model switching. I'll also illustrate how uncertainty can be monitored and used for



model creation, model switching and model merging. I'll finally show how this can be applied to deep probabilistic model-based RL, where we used a Bayesian last layer and derived an analytical solution to disentangle model uncertainty and aleatoric uncertainty. This is illustrated with simulations of a 3-dof robotic arm in a target reaching task with abrupt changes in the dynamics function, and efficient storage of distinct learned world models. Moreover, this is achieved at a drastically reduced computational cost, thus showing sample efficiency, compared to existing methods based on intensive Monte Carlo sampling.

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## ***Embodiment, Interaction, Adaptation***

**Catherine Pelachaud** (ISIR Paris)

### **Abstract:**

Socially Interactive Agents are embodied virtual or physical entities endowed with the capacity to communicate with human users. We are developing models that allow these agents to use different adaptation strategies to foster user engagement. We implemented phenomena such as imitation, intra- and inter-synchronization, and conversational strategies. These strategies impact how users perceive agents and the interaction quality. In this talk, I will present our latest models and experiments we have conducted.

**Tuesday, October 22<sup>nd</sup> 2024**

## ***Seeing with and being seen – visual perspective taking in with real humans and artificial agents***

**Antonia Hamilton** (UCL, London)

### **Abstract:**

Humans behave differently when they are in the presence of other people or when they believe they are being watched by others. I will share data from a series of studies examining the effects of being watched by humans or artificial agents in the context of visual perspective taking and communication. I will argue that people can modify their behaviour to signal to others, depending on whether they believe those others can see them and are relevant to them.

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## ***Measuring the sense of self and interpersonal coordination of professional actors in real-world environments***

**Dwaynica Graves** (UCL, London)

### **Abstract:**

Over the past five years, we have developed brain imaging paradigms to measure the sense of self and interpersonal coordination in professional actors as they rehearse and perform. Our interest in actors arises from the realisation that they are trained throughout their careers to create both phenomenal and narrative selves for their characters. These new dimensions of character selves are crafted using the actor's own phenomenal and narrative self, and this overlap may have intriguing effects on the actor's sense of self. In this talk, I will discuss our published work in which we utilised functional near-infrared spectroscopy (fNIRS) hyperscanning and physiological recordings to study a pair of actors during rehearsals, measuring their sense of self and interpersonal coordination (Greaves & Pini et al., 2022). I will

dissect our methodologies and findings, demonstrating how to build neuroscientific paradigms in dynamic environments for the purpose of measuring social-cognitive functions. Reference: Dwaynica A. Greaves, Paola Pinti, Sara Din, Robert Hickson, Mingyi Diao, Charlotte Lange, Priyasha Khurana, Kelly Hunter, Ilias Tachtsidis, Antonia F. de C. Hamilton; Exploring Theater Neuroscience: Using Wearable Functional Near-infrared Spectroscopy to Measure the Sense of Self and Interpersonal Coordination in Professional Actors. *J Cogn Neurosci* 2022; doi: [https://doi.org/10.1162/jocn\\_a\\_01912](https://doi.org/10.1162/jocn_a_01912)

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### ***Looking at concepts: Neural underpinnings of non-visual eye movements during thinking***

**Art Pilacinski** (Ruhr University Bochum)

#### **Abstract:**

What is the biggest country in Africa? Why should we pay taxes? Ask someone these questions and you will probably notice how their eyes move while they are trying to find the right answer. Although there is clearly a link between eye movements and memory, the neural basis of this link is not yet well understood. It was recently proposed that our brain uses the neural systems responsible for spatial navigation to also organize semantic spaces. That means, organizing information in long term memory might have evolved from the circuitry responsible for navigating the environment. When thinking, task-relevant information is activated and manipulated within those spaces. It is unclear, however, why would eye movements accompany this mnemonic information manipulation process. To tackle this, we studied non-visual eye movements (NEMs) in verbal long term memory retrieval (thinking), and their underlying neural patterns recorded with human EEG. Our results suggest that NEMs are a byproduct of attentional shifts that engage parieto-frontal saccade planning network during semantic memory search. It appears that, when thinking, we scan the activated concept space similarly to as if we were looking at the objects. This is the first study on the neural underpinnings of the phenomenon of eye movements we make while thinking. Its implications yield a new perspective on the evolution of human intelligence from sensorimotor systems

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### ***One Step Closer to my Heart: Cardiac Cycle is Coupled with Footsteps in Typical but not in Depersonalisation Individuals***

**Veronika Alekseeva** (CIMeC, University of Trento)

#### **Abstract:**

Human bodies are highly dynamic systems, constantly moving both inside (e.g., heartbeats) and in the outside world (e.g., footsteps, walking) to secure survival. The mechanisms underlying the interplay between exteroceptive and interoceptive self-related sensory signals are key to understanding the sense of self and its disturbances (Park and Blanke 2009). Previous work showed that the bodily self is not fixed but constantly updated through dynamic sensory feedback, including sound feedback (Tajadura-Jiménez et al. 2012; 2015). Depersonalisation is a very common phenomenon that makes people feel detached from their bodily self (Sierra & Berríos 1997). Here, we will briefly present work investigating the dynamic coupling between bodily movements from inside the body (i.e., cardiac signals) with bodily actions in the world (e.g., walking) in people with high and low occurrences of depersonalisation.

Our study reveals for the first time that the dynamic coupling between bodily movements from the inside (e.g., cardiac signals) and bodily actions in the world (i.e., walking) is altered in depersonalisation, but not in typical individuals. Our results provide further evidence that people feeling detached from their bodies are literally out of sync with their inner body, i.e., heartbeats. We will then discuss potential implications of our findings on implementing dynamic sensory processing in artificial agents such as social robots

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## ***BODILY FUTURES: DANCE and AI***

**Sylvia Rijmer** (Superior School of Dance-IPL, Lisbon) & **Cláudia Sevivas** (IADE – Creative University)

### **Abstract:**

BODILY FUTURES: DANCE and AI is the result of an evolving interdisciplinary and multimodal research project which is focused on the intersection between AI and human creativity in contemporary dance-making. This interactive talk is based on the ongoing discussions and propositions between a choreographer, a cognitive-linguist, a computer researcher and five contemporary dancers. It showcases a practical application that blends human dance data focused on qualitative movements guided by the Body Logic Method with AI-generated kinetic sequences using LSTM models. By mimicking human creativity, the AI model offers new movement gestures to dancers, encouraging fresh reflections on cognitive decision-making and inviting them to explore unfamiliar movement choices. This project offers novel perspectives on how technology can reinforce artistic expression and challenge habitual decision-making in dance. We offer an AI generated model as a compositional tool grounded in cognitive science, designed to challenge inherited habits and practices in contemporary dance-making. Project funded by: IPL/IDI&CA2023/BL\_Method\_ESD

# Poster session

22<sup>nd</sup> October

Poster #1

## *Phantom touch illusion: How the brain provides apparent touch in virtual reality*

**Sophia Bertoni** – [skbertoni@gmail.com](mailto:skbertoni@gmail.com)

**Affiliation:** University of Coimbra

### **Abstract:**

Users in shared virtual spaces, such as VRChat and the Metaverse, often report a weak sensation of touch when interacting with objects or other users, despite the absence of real physical contact. This phenomenon raises questions about tactile perception, particularly in light of tactile suppression, a mechanism where the nervous system diminishes predicted sensory input from our own movements (Blakemore et al., 2000). But what occurs with tactile suppression when there are no actual tactile signals, yet visual cues of touch are present?

In a recent study (Pilacinski et al., 2023), we answered this by examining the “phantom touch illusion” (PTI), where users experienced a tingling sensation when touching their virtual bodies with an object. This sensation correlated with the location touched, and its intensity varied across different parts of the hand. Remarkably, the illusion also persisted even when participants touched invisible parts of their limbs, suggesting that PTI arises from the tactile suppression process.

We further tested this by comparing PTI with self-touch using laser pointers and pantomimed (invisible) touch, which elicited a tingling sensation in a significantly lower number of participants. Thus, the absence of physical touch in virtual environments still generates a weak tingling sensation. Our findings indicate that tactile suppression is influenced by multisensory input related to the body schema. This suggests that the brain constructs a multi-sensory representation of the virtual world, integrating visual information to enhance the experience of presence in these immersive spaces, offering insights into embodied experiences in virtual environments.

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Poster #2

## *Taking a role: the weight of choice in an interactive narrative*

**Gabriella Andrietta** – [mgsa@student.uc.pt](mailto:mgsa@student.uc.pt)

**Affiliation:** University of Coimbra

### **Abstract:**

In our everyday lives, we are constantly in contact with fictional narratives by watching movies or reading a book. Our experiences with those stories can be deeply emotional and significant for us even if we are only observers of the character’s journeys. However, there are situations that we are not merely spectators of a narrative, but we have an active role in its story. In this exploratory study, the aim was to look at how people react to taking a role in an interactive narrative (videogame *Life is Strange True Colors*) and how they make decisions in this setting. Through the use of a semi-structured interviews, the participants (N=14) reported how they felt while in contact with the game, how they chose their interactions with the storyworld and the main aspects of their narrative experience.

The coding of the interviews revealed that the participants felt like their choices mattered and they would influence the outcome of the story. Many of the participants reported that they made their choices based on what they would do in that situation and wished for the best outcome for the main character. Participants often reported identification with some aspects of the story such as the main character and the situations they went through, some participants even reported identification with the main character through their own choices. Overall, the results indicate that participants had a sense of agency through the interactive narrative experience, which may show that we can embody artificial agents through simple interactions.

# Practical Information

## Venue

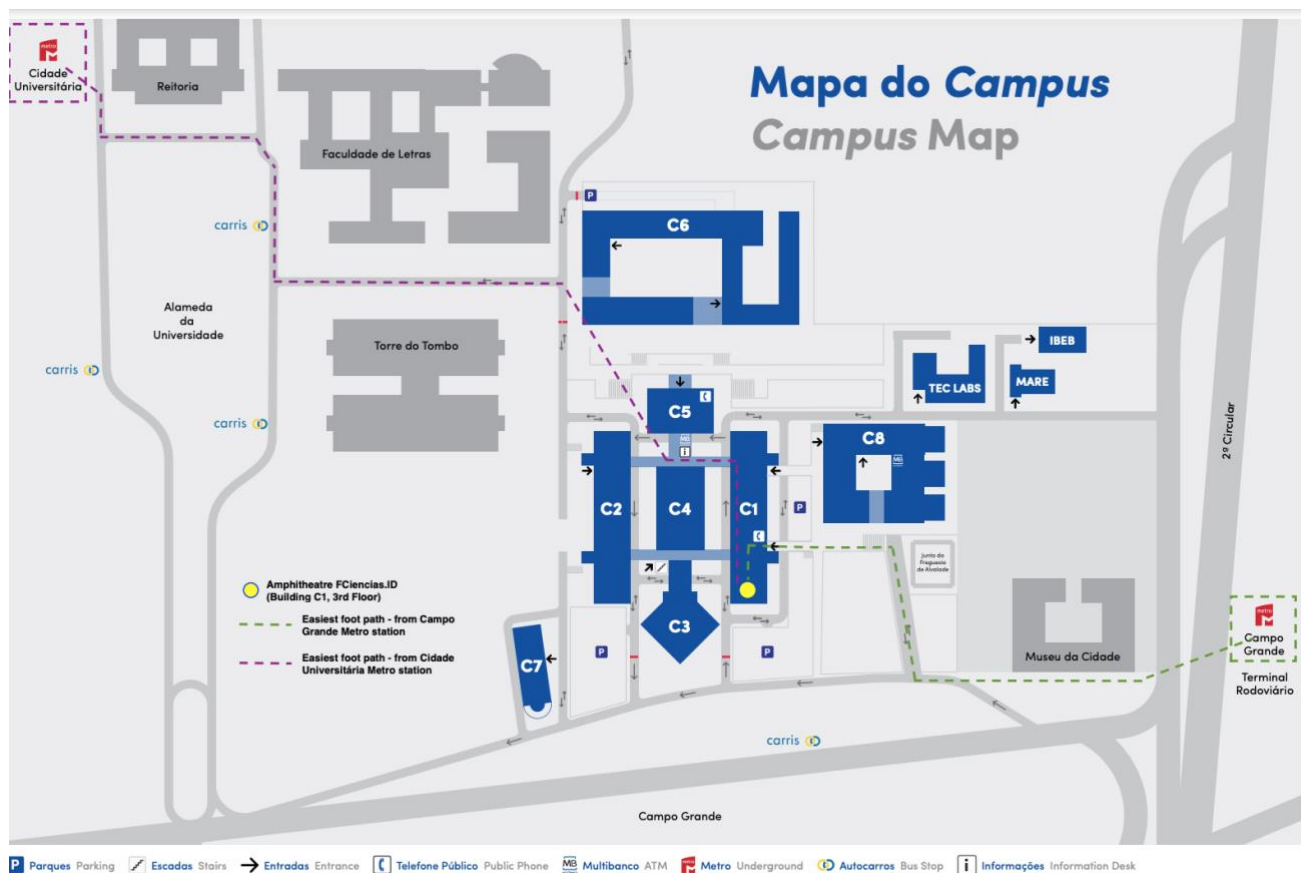
Amphitheatre of FCIências.ID & Online live streamed  
Faculty of Sciences of the University of Lisbon. Building C1, Floor 3 - Campo Grande, Lisbon



### How to get to the Venue:

Getting to the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Lisbon is easy and quick, by subway, car (Uber/Bolt), bus or even bicycle (cycle lanes).

This Map guides you from the metro station Cidade Universitária and Campo Grande to the Venue.



### Available transportation:

Lisbon is a wonderful city to walk and it is well served by a public transportation network that includes subway, buses, and tramway. If you want to visit the outskirts, you can catch a train or a boat, depending on where you want to go.

To use the public transports, you can purchase the '7 Colinas' / 'Viva Viagem' electronic travel card, which you can then top up with balance for your journeys and can be used for the Metro, Train and for Carris (bus and tramway network).

### **Bus**

[Carris](#): 701, 717, 731, 735, 736, 738, 747, 750, 755, 764, 767, 768, 778, 783, 796, 798

[Rodoviária de Lisboa](#): 201, 300, 311, 312, 313, 315, 329, 331, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 344, 353, 354, 901, 931

### **Metro**

Cidade Universitária and Campo Grande Stations <http://www.metrolisboa.pt/en/>

### **Train**

Entrecampos Station

### **Car**

2.<sup>a</sup> circular – Campo Grande / Cidade Universitária exit

**Taxis** are cheap and there are other companies such as Uber and Cabify. Bike sharing is growing, and you can rent a bike via Gira or Uber.

### **Bycicle**

Gira 480 station

## **Online attendance**

The conference will be hybrid. You can join [here](#) via zoom.

# A very crude, possibly outdated, and small Guide to Lisbon

This list was written over a period of 10 years on small mobile devices with non-Portuguese keyboards, so, yes, it is a grammatical-mess and typo wonderland. Enjoy it!

## ... a bit about neighborhoods

First, we will zoom in some of the more well known neighborhoods inside the city.

### Estefânia



Really nice district, some people might not even consider it a real district but you have a bit of everything too and it is super central. You still find places with that traditional neighborhood feeling but also new places, small cafés and the likes, and small parks to hangout at (especially the Jardim to Torel (<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Jardim+do+Torel/@38.7190686,-9.143303,15.74z/data=!4m13!1m7!3m6!1s0xd1933849d3956ef:0x6f8dcd13a347ff09!2sCampo+9.1395078!3m4!1s0xd193383e8c294a9:0x7b94f9431fcc2058!8m2!3d38.7188366!4d-9.1413199>) – check the view and walk down stairs, there's a hidden café). I would say this is one of my favorite places in the city, my sister lives here.

### Estrela



Really beautiful district, which is slightly off the center of Lisbon, probably giving it more space to diversify and be what it wants to be. You have a bit of everything, the old Lisbon (some important sights such as the Basilica da Estrela are here), a neighborhood feeling but also new places, cafés, and a beautiful park to hangout at (Jardim da Estrela). I would say this is one of my favorite places in the city.



## Intendente / Morais Soares / Almirante Reis



This is odd, since this is not a neighborhood but more like one neighborhood and two giant streets. But it all forms a vertical avenue that went from sketchy to trendy in 10 years, I still can't believe my eyes when I walk here now. While I could spend pages critiquing the downsides of all this development and gentrification, there's a lot of nice places and new cultural venues. I would say this is my second favorite location, if I had only 3 days in Lisbon I would stay here, maybe around Arroios or Intendente. The plus side is no matter where you stay, you are always on the green line subway. This is also home to many of the restaurants and venues I mention.

## Bairro alto / Bica / Príncipe Real



**Bairro Alto** also is the narrow street up a hill meets night district-thingy. A labyrinth of streets. Grab a beer drink outside. Even in the winter. From Largo do Camões to Príncipe real. That is bairro alto, from Luís Soriano/Século to Miradouro S. Pedro.

**Bica** is as much part of bairro as it isn't. It grew more recently to become the after-bairro. Also to become a more relaxed version of that. Its a beautiful street, that goes from Cais do Sodré (Rua de São Paulo) up to Calharis, where Bairro Alto's majestic Rua da Rosa starts. Bica is a street, but its also an elevator. Bica is a junction of african bars. But a junction of pseudo posh mini bars and a jazz joint. Ten times better than bairro. The only downside is that this list is old and both bairro and bica might have lost some of their charm, still recommended.

Then, above these two, you have **Príncipe Real**. Really nice area which is home to the botanic garden, lots of good restaurants, including one below on my list. This is probably a nicer place to stay than Bairro alto.

## Alfama / Castelo



True place down to the stones you walk on, I do still believe it has the fado and the soul of sailors. Will it disappear? As things change, it will change too. Still, go there and soak it all in. Also, from alfama to the castelo (st. george's castle) is one of the nicest walks you can take in lisbon .

## Alcantara / Lx-factory



I'm not really discussing the neighborhood here but more this place called Lx-factory. Its the overtake of an old ground shared by 4 factories (mostly graphics, fabrics) and now its a hip space with some designer shops, a great bookstore called Ler Devagar (like really great!!!! means "Read Slow"), an art gallery (ArtHobler where some musical events happen sporadically) and a great co-working space (by the same name) in case you need a emergency working location. There are some restaurants, see above. While this is a bit outside of the center, you are on your way to enjoy the new MAAT museum, Belem (with its majestic garden and cultural center, and yes, the pasteis).

## Expo / parque das nações / all that space leading to it by the river



So this is another up and coming place. The whole river area from alfama to expo is buzzing with new activity (the old Expo 98 grounds are aboslutely a must visit, it's official name is Parque do Orient, but everyone just says expo). First folks moved there becasue it was cheap, then art galleries did the same, then everything came. For example, here you have the Fabrica Braco de Prata (<https://www.bracodeprata.com/>), a semi abandoned location turned into cultural center, café, place for philosophy gatherings, you name it.

## ... a bit about outside the city

Second, we will zoom out to just mention quickly three places outside the city. p.s.: bear in mind any of these cities is technically much larger than lisbon and home to many more inhabitants, the municipality of might actually be smaller than say the municipality of sintra. I could write really large lists about cascais (I was born here) or sintra, but I'll leave you to the internet and your sense of discovery.



## Cascais = beach

You don't need a car to get here and it is quite easy to get around cascais by foot.

**Sintra = mountains meet beach meet historical (I know, wow, no wonder Crowley loved**

it)

You don't need a car to get here.

## Arrabida = mountains meet ocean

You (might) need a car to get here.

## To see

### Caloust gulbenkian museum of modern art / Metro station: São Sebastião

The Gulbenkian Foundation has three of the best things of Portugal: a garden, a great modern art museum and the probably the best jazz festival in the world (in August's first weeks) named "Jazz em Agosto" and hyper internationally renowned.

### Cinamateca de Lisboa / near Avenida da Liberdade

Cinamateca de Lisboa might vanish or not, it has been crying out for governmental help for quite a while. I've seen it peak and then been flush down, with less program every month. No matter what, go there, buy two tickets, watch two movies. There are no popcorns. Sit down and enjoy, they even have a nice café, I really miss this place.

### Zaratan / <https://www.facebook.com/zaratan.ac/>

Contemporary art gallery which dabbles into multimedia domains too, such as installations, music & performance, etc. The nice thing is that it is a not-for-profit space run by artists, which aims to promote a deeper comprehension of contemporary art practices (their words!).

### Crew Hassan (might be closed by now)

Crew Hassan (<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Crew+Hassan++Cultural+Cooperative+C.+L.+R./@38.7246781,-9.1380445,15.38z/data=!4m13!1m7!3m6!1s0xd1933849d3956ef:0x6f8dcd13a347ff09!2sCampo+dos+M%C3%A1rtires+9.1395078!3m4!1s0xd1933816a3aa457:0x4e2c7f19bbfd1cd7!8m2!3d38.7226058!4d-9.1332012>) is a lovely place that has moved so much I've lost track over the years, one of my first performances ever was there, but it was located somewhere else deeper in the city. Now it is located in near intendente, making it super convenient, since this area boomed from no-go to must-go over the years. Crew Hassan is a bar, record store, hangout place, etc.

## To eat (vegan)

I can only talk about vegan places, and the real guides are plentiful on the web (<http://www.happycow.net/europe/portugal/lisbon/>), but here are some quick personal recommendations – a real list would fill pages and pages, so here is just a few things that are really really delicious:

- Vegan Eats cafe (<https://www.facebook.com/veganeatscaffe/>): This looks like an ordinary cafe. It isn't, unless planet earth would become a really nice place all together and all ordinary cafes would be ran by lovely ladies that are really caring about their customers. They don't have much food: one/two main dishes a day, three or four cakes and if you are REALLY lucky pão-com-choriço or if you are at the end of the probability function and you are really lucky "pastel de nata". They will make you feel so comfortable you might wanna cancel your plans for the day and just bring your laptop or book.
  1. The food Temple (<https://www.facebook.com/FoodTemple>): perhaps one of the best restaurants on planet earth. Located in the heart of a old school lisbon neighborhood which I really appreciate, it is located in a small small house with some stairs outside, easily missed, be aware. (vegan, medium price; secret tip, I reserve table via Facebook before I go)
  2. Tao (<http://www.happycow.net/reviews/tao-lisbon-21937>), located in downtown lisbon, super convenient and amazing price/quality, note that the dishes are huge and you can take home the rests (since it is buffet style), which is awesome for a second meal.
  3. Terra ([http://www.restauranteterra.pt/Terra/Bem\\_vindo.html](http://www.restauranteterra.pt/Terra/Bem_vindo.html)) is like one of the fancier vegan places but also has my respect since it was one of the oldest (vegan buffet, hi-quality, expensive for portuguese pockets).

## Listen

### Galeria Zé dos Bois / Bairro Alto, Rua da Barroca 59

Zdb (<http://www.zedosbois.org>), is the quintessential place of experimental scene in Lisbon. In the heart of Bairro Alto's maze of perpendicular narrow cobbled stone streets. Drop by, make sure to listen some of the most interesting stuff being made worldwide.

### Damas // <https://www.facebook.com/DAMASLISBOA/>

This is a really beautiful venue and restaurant. Good to meet your friends or to check out good music, good dis and good people that run the space. p.s.: They are really trying to offer one vegan dish everyday (hooray, and it is usually really delicious), which is making Damas qualify for my "to eat" list too :D

### casa dos amigos do minho, largo do intendente

this is like an "old people's hangout" that is so sweet and rough that youngsters have joined in. Sometimes hosts events but mainly its about cheap drinks and chilling. (just google it, it is also next door to a very prominent place in the hipster culture which is "Casa Independente" which is a great and special bar too, featuring a backyard).

## desterro, calcada do desterro, largo do intendente

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Desterro (<https://www.facebook.com/desterrolx/>) is the new (I wrote this 10 year ago) spot that some of my friends are running. Quite an interesting space, located in a "not cool" neighborhood (again, 10 year ago, now you can't even rent here!) which actually has lots of interesting paces, desterro being the most contemporary of them all. Mainly a music venue but some other events (workshops, mini exhibitions, chess&music, improv) also happen there. Entrance costs 2 euros a year or something like that, its amazing. This is also in the dance category somehow.

## Drink (day or night)

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### Pavilhão Chinês / Rua Dom Pedro V 89

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One of the most extraordinary bars in the country because 1) its old 2) it makes no sense, it almost clashes with what Lisbon 's was erected as a touristic spot. the Chinese Pavilion, a former brothel in Principe Real district, is a furnished hall of weird collection figures and bad/good taste furniture.

### Loucos e Sonhadores / Travessa do Conde de Soure 2, Bairro Alto

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This is an experience. A joint. Its not even a bar. Its an association. Just enter. Go alone and pick a book, or go together and talk loud. Some people will probably smoke.

### Gingjinha, the one / Rua das Portas de Santo Antão 7

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There are obviously several Gingjinha (cherry liquor, pretty sweet drink) houses spread here and there, mainly from Bairro Alto's surroundings to the more traditional and truthful (cruel) Alfama district (fado district as well). This one is a classic, from students to tourists to natives. A cliché.

### Damas / see below

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This place is so special it fits multiple categories, such as food or music.

## small-eat and drink during day time + chill

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### noobai cafe / Miradouro de Santa Catarina aka Miradouro do Adamastor

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noobai has a pretty view of Lisbon . Good on a sunny day. It is crowded because people know of its amazing view and simple food. So go at weird hours. <http://www.noobaicafe.com/> (<http://www.noobaicafe.com/>) Also its at Adamastor, a viewpoint that the citizen's named after the great beast that the portuguese conquered while discovering the seas of southern africa, the beast (obviously a literary interpretation of the high tides) is featured Camões epic novel "Os Lusíadas"- tale of the Portuguese sea discoveries until India. The miradouro (lookout point) is also where lots of young folks gather, also lots of weed smoking there – you have been warned.

### 1o andar, rua do coliseu, and then on a small street to the left, in front of coliseu (status unknown, let me know if this is still open post covid)

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This is a crazy spot. It has hosted many project attempts. All lovable. This one seems to hold longer, it is based inside a sports gymnasium from the neighborhood. Seriously, the place is astonishing. Have a beer in the middle of the basketball court at 3am, empty and dark. Lovely. Veggie food available. (<https://www.facebook.com/primeiroandarateneu/> (<https://www.facebook.com/primeiroandarateneu/>))

### martin moniz

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this is a place where lots of immigrants hang around, which makes it beautiful. Recently they tried to invade it with food stands and a tiny DJ stage, which wasn't all bad but clearly a strong commercial attempt. Still, there is a decent vegetarian/vegan stand, the one with the bikes hanging from the ceiling. Worth it to just sit there for a few hours.

### lx-factory, alcantara

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The Lx factory has a couple of nice food treats, some of these places appear and disappear but give it a shot. See below because the place is mostly a alternative designer/shop ground (if you come from berlin, not that different from RAW with more shops). perhaps check the restaurants before going if that is the sole purpose of your visit: <http://www.lxfactory.com/PT/residentes/restauracao/> (<http://www.lxfactory.com/PT/residentes/restauracao/>) **but denote that the bookshop alone is worth your trip, and I mean like the whole trip from your country to this one.**

## Dance Afterlife

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### Lux // <http://www.luxfragil.com>

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One of the few sal(i)ventions from dance boredom. Set in the loading docs, a majestic two floor building, that (usually) harvests Lisbon 's best DJs and concerts from now and then.

p.s.: there are obviously more night clubs but you would be asking the wrong person (me).

# No-dance Afterlife

## Associação Cultural Amigos da Feira da Ladra // <https://www.facebook.com/acaf131/>

You will thank me for this. I thanked my friends for showing it to me. It is a local-kinda hangout where you can have a drink for cheap and hangout until sun is really-up. Weird locals and drinks served in way to big glasses, insanely chill hangout but be ready for weirdness.

p.s.: In most “Associação” (community associations) the place will look like it is closed but it is not. You just ring the door. This is a workaround the legislation for closing bars early that community spaces found a few years ago and is heavily used. Also they might ask you “are you a member” and the answer is inevitably “yes” (same reason as before).

## DIY spaces

Lisbon has been booming with DIY spaces, these connect different spectra of the cite together: people with machines with people with ideas, people with some funds with people without, and helps build bridges into local communities that otherwise might see the newcomers as weirdos. Here's a few that I have visited:

- RDA (<https://rda69.wordpress.com/> (<https://rda69.wordpress.com/>) and <https://www.facebook.com/rda6949/> (<https://www.facebook.com/rda6949/>)): is a cultural association that has pretty much an open attitude about life: from bike repairs, make your own pizza, dance, music, ping pong, debates, cheap food, etc. Lots of local people which really matters!  
- Disgraça ([https://www.facebook.com/disgracadiycenter/?ref=py\\_c](https://www.facebook.com/disgracadiycenter/?ref=py_c) ([https://www.facebook.com/disgracadiycenter/?ref=py\\_c](https://www.facebook.com/disgracadiycenter/?ref=py_c)) and <http://www.disgraca.com/> (<http://www.disgraca.com/>)). In their words: “We're a DIY anticooltural centre who aims to create an horizontal safe space free of racism, speciesism, homophobia and sexism. We have a volunteer-driven vegan canteen every Monday and Friday at 8pm.”
- Desterro (<http://darc.pt/desterro/> (<http://darc.pt/desterro/>), was on Venue list too): one of lisbon 's best and most active places. Mostly a bar w/ live dis and music but also a place for meetings of DIY electronics and just electronic/synth jams (check out desterronics).
- AltLab (<https://altlab.org/> (<https://altlab.org/>)) that's lisbon 's prime DIY/Fab/maker community: arduinos, textiles, open-source kind of things. I was going to some meetings there about 5/6 years ago and they are still active. A good way to know what's up is to also subscribe to their mailing list.
- CoderDojo and Hackerschool (<https://www.facebook.com/hackerschoolist> (<https://www.facebook.com/hackerschoolist>)): organized at IST university a small gathering that offers courses and learning experiences around tech.
- FabLab (<http://fablablisboa.pt/> (<http://fablablisboa.pt/>)) I opted to put fablabs in the end of the main DIY list since it is more on the institutional/fancy side of things and I want to separate the waters a bit. Still totally awesome place.

Some more which I don't have time to go into detail or I haven't been able to experience them:

- Zona Franca nos Anjos ([https://www.facebook.com/zonafranca.nosanjos/?ref=py\\_c](https://www.facebook.com/zonafranca.nosanjos/?ref=py_c) ([https://www.facebook.com/zonafranca.nosanjos/?ref=py\\_c](https://www.facebook.com/zonafranca.nosanjos/?ref=py_c)))
- BUS ([https://www.facebook.com/BusParagemCultural/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/BusParagemCultural/about/?ref=page_internal) ([https://www.facebook.com/BusParagemCultural/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/BusParagemCultural/about/?ref=page_internal)))

## To read and work calmly

There are many libraries and similar places where you can work in a quiet environment:

A. The complete network of lisbon 's libraries is here: <http://blx.cm-lisboa.pt/redeblx> (<http://blx.cm-lisboa.pt/redeblx>) This includes all the opening/closing times, so please check it (use google translate). - Camões / cais do sodré (<http://blx.cm-lisboa.pt/gca/index.php?id=396> (<http://blx.cm-lisboa.pt/gca/index.php?id=396>)) probably the most convenient. - Olivais (a bit far on red line but offers BD / comic books – which is amazing): <http://blx.cm-lisboa.pt/gca/index.php?id=452> (<http://blx.cm-lisboa.pt/gca/index.php?id=452>) - Lumiar (an almost out of lisbon place, but offers Sound / CDs / Audio – which is great, there are even some of my CDs there!): <http://blx.cm-lisboa.pt/gca/index.php?id=460> (<http://blx.cm-lisboa.pt/gca/index.php?id=460>)

B. Probably the best place is: <https://gulbenkian.pt/biblioteca-arte/en/> (<https://gulbenkian.pt/biblioteca-arte/en/>) Garden and library (of art) and museum too. All worth it, one of the best gardens in Lx.

C. Also, the Goethe institute (<https://www.goethe.de/ins/pt/pt/kul/bib.html> (<https://www.goethe.de/ins/pt/pt/kul/bib.html>)), they have a kind of library space (not sure if you need their card) but they also just have tables outside and a garden. In the summer the garden is amazing and they even have their nicely curated jazz festival. I really like their garten (it was also the only place I ever really studied German seriously for a few months).

## places removed from the list because they closed

This could be the rant part of the list, where I dive into the whole explosion of lisbon in the past years , the gentrification and politics... but I have no time, so it's really just a list of places I had to take out from the list over the years, since they closed. They were all active 10 years ago when I lived in lisbon , but 10 years, is well: a lot.

## Fabulas / <http://fabulas.pt>



Right in the heart of Baixa Chiado. Has some vegan, veggie and wifi. Lisbon hipster spotting, the last times I was there the vibe was getting a lil bit out of control, so maybe dropping in my ranking.

## Trem Azul / Rua do Alecrim 21A

Europe's most amazing record shop. Enough said. <http://www.tremazul.com/> (<http://www.tremazul.com/>) p.s.: It is closed now. Sad. Just sad. Still, this is so important for me I want to keep it here on this list. Note that these wonderful people behind it are all still around and doing awesome things. So check the label Clean Feed.

**Hare Krishna da Estefânia (this probably had a more official name but we always called it like that) its a place ran by a hare Krishna community in Estefânia, its amazing experience, you sit and get one meal which has everything (no choice, keep it simple), delicious and fair price. Really nice mini garden outside.**

<https://www.facebook.com/harekrishnalisboa> (<https://www.facebook.com/harekrishnalisboa>) (my sister tells me this close during Covid, might have to be moved down, makes me sad)

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life



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