



SCOPIO & CONTRAST OPEN CALL

## **Trees as Visual Thinking**

*Dária Joana Teixeira Salgado*  
*with Sérgio Tavares (sound/music)*

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### Abstract:

The work forwards an aesthetic and sensory reflection concerning the presence of trees in our contemporary landscapes, namely in urban contexts, conceiving them as “visual thought.” Their materiality, mutability, and imagistic charge shape the individual and collective experience of places, transforming the perception and experience of space. The project starts by observing the differences between spaces inhabited by trees and those whose absence is noted, exploring at the same time the implications of this presence in constructing the urban imaginary. The work falls under the theme “Exploring Contemporary Realities,” articulating an artistic journey and a theoretical essay anchored in photographic representation as a research tool. In addition to photography, audiovisual and sound capture are used, exploring the relationship between still images, moving images, and sounds, in a synesthetic approach that prioritises the perception and affective experience of the landscape. The research focuses on the changing effects caused by trees: the visual impermanence generated by light and wind, tonal and chromatic variations, the metamorphosis of shadows, the movement of leaves and trunks, and the sounds of other living beings that inhabit them. These elements will be collected and analysed in a dynamic between sound and silence, noise and natural melody, allowing for the creation of visual and sound compositions, eventually integrated into installations. Inspired by Aby Warburg and his expression “the external cause of the image”, where wind is a vehicle of emotion and pathos, the essay proposes an approach in which the body, in interaction with the landscape, actively participates in the redefinition of places. Accordingly, the sensitive mediation between body and space becomes the core of an artistic process, and by doing so, it reveals the uniqueness of trees as agents of transformation and meaning in the contemporary urban environment.

Keywords: Trees, Urban landscape, Sensory perception, Photographic representation, Spatial transformation

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**Dária Joana Teixeira Salgado** holds a PhD in Contemporary Art from the College of Arts of the University of Coimbra. Designer, artist, and higher education professor. She is an integrated researcher at the Arnaldo Araújo Study Center in the Art and Critical Studies Research Group and a member of the Association of Moving Image Researchers. Since 2005, she has developed projects in the areas of drawing, photography, and video, participating in festivals, performances, exhibitions, and conferences. <https://www.cienciavita.pt/en/EF12-6F92-55EE>

**Sérgio Tavares** is a bass musician born in Porto, where he lives. He studied at ESMAE, holds a master’s degree in music education and a bachelor’s degree in bass. He teaches bass and has participated in various improvised music/jazz projects and multidisciplinary collaborations with artists from diverse fields such as dance, video, and poetry. <https://sergio-tavares---0.webnode.pt>

In their material concreteness and changing appearance, trees reveal a universe of transformation of places, shaping the personal and collective experience of the territories we inhabit. The tree, in its corporeal and visual power, guides reflection toward the senses, toward the way it transforms our presence and experience in space. As an aesthetic response, the aim is to draw attention to the transformation, modification, and, most importantly, the difference and relationship between places inhabited by trees and those devoid of them.

To respond to the thematic challenge “Exploring Contemporary Realities,” the research will be directed toward the imagery of trees in contemporary urban landscapes, projecting the development of an artistic work accompanied by a theoretical essay framed within the field of photographic representation as a tool for artistic research. Photography, but also its exploration alongside audiovisual media (including still and moving images and the sound dimension), as visual and sound research resources centered on the perceptive, sensory, and affective experience of the landscape in the urban context, will be the means to be used in the search for and exploration of different forms of artistic research, enabling the construction of different discursive spaces – series of works whose results will be highly dependent on the procedural resources (between image and sound collection).

As a starting point for the collection, we will seek to identify the expression of these places through the effects of change, the perceptive and sensory transformation that the presence of trees imposes, exploring their visual impermanence provided by the influence of light and wind. What might we find? Variations in the treetops, resulting from the movement reflected in the visual effect of changes in lighting, which necessarily include the effects of changing shadows, as well as chromatic variations with their tonal and saturation differences. But also, the effects of the wind passing through the leaves and the swaying trunks, as well as the sounds of other living elements that inhabit the trees. These and other elements can be collected and analyzed in a dynamic between sound/silence and sounds/noises, elements that constitute these soundscapes and that can add value to the images or serve as material for the creation of a sound installation.

It will be through the imagery of trees, from the glimpse of its uniqueness (trees as visual thought), that we intend to consider the dynamic connections between place and the changing effects that trees provide. Therefore, reflecting on an effective/aesthetic and synesthetic experience of an active body operating in a participatory dynamic. Or, to paraphrase Aby Warburg, working on “the external cause of the image”<sup>1</sup>. This expression Warburg uses to refer to the wind as a vehicle of affection and *pathos*<sup>2</sup> through which we access the most intimate reasons for the body’s movement as it reacts to stimuli. The body will be redefined with the concept of landscape of these places in a dialogical process of resignification. In the end, the mediation of a body in space as a natural result of incorporation.

1. In Didi-Huberman, Diante do tempo. (Lisboa: Orfeu Negro, 2017).

2. Greek word for suffering, emotion and intensity.

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