Faculdade de Belas Artes da Universidade do Porto

Master in Art and Design for the Public Space

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(ENG) Performative Methodology of Urban Exploration

Movement PERFORTO: Ephemeral Practices in Public Space in Porto

(PT) Metodologia performativa da exploração urbana

Movimento PERFORTO: Práticas efémeras no espaço público no Porto

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Submitted by:

Agnieszka Alicja Janasik

student number: 202400506

up202400506@edu.fba.up.pt

Supervisor: Prof.ª Drª. Né Barros

Porto, 26.06.2026

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Abstract

In this research, performance art is explored as a method for investigating urban structures and social environments, as well as creating visual and ephemeral situations in public spaces. The study focuses on the city of Porto and analyzes how performative practices can be used to experiment with the human body and the collective experience in urban realm. The main research question is: *How can Performance Art be used to discover and reveal Genius Loci (the spirit of a place) in public space?* Practice and experiments follow to expanding the performative practises, which has insignificant impact of perceiving the urban surroundings. To discover the surprise in public space, there is a need to experiment. In terms of methodology, the human body is viewed as a tool for analysis, involving interaction with the city through experimental exercises to uncover hidden potentials of space. By becoming an active observer of the urban situation, performance art becomes both a path of discovery and a measure of analysis. To discover *the spirit of space*, three exercises were created to help participants assimilate space and analyze it as active observers. By creating situations using sensory stimuli such as visual, auditory, and atmospheric elements in public spaces, it becomes the possibility to discover the environment through individual perception. Research also involves following *Serendipity* to discover something without looking for it. The research is based on one's own perception of the city and an invitation to a version of space that can be understood differently and directly. The first step is understanding a place to discover its potential and creating a safe atmosphere, both mentally and physically. The results of the study suggest that ephemeral experimental practices provide deeper insight into the characteristics of urban spaces, allowing the creation of performance art. The human body uncovers not only the city, but also itself. The conclusions highlight the value of an experimental approach to the environment considering its structural, social, ecological, and historical aspects. This approach combines unexpected elements to create abstract situations, demonstrating that imagination can serve as an unlimited form of learning and creating.

***Keywords**:* Performance Art, Public Space, Genius Loci (Spirit of Place), Ephemeral Practices Design, Experimental Methodology, Spatial Analysis, Practise - based research, Experimental urbanism, performance – based research;

Resumo

Nesta investigação, a arte performativa é explorada como um método para investigar estruturas urbanas e ambientes sociais, bem como para criar situações visuais e efémeras em espaços públicos. O estudo centra-se na cidade do Porto e analisa como as práticas performativas podem ser utilizadas para experimentar com o corpo humano e a experiência coletiva no espaço urbano. A principal questão de investigação é: *Como pode a arte performativa ser utilizada para descobrir e revelar o Genius Loci (o espírito de um lugar) no espaço público?*

Seguem-se práticas e experiências destinadas a expandir as práticas performativas, que têm um impacto insignificante na perceção do ambiente urbano. Para descobrir a surpresa no espaço público, é necessário experimentar. Em termos de metodologia, o corpo humano é visto como uma ferramenta de análise, envolvendo a interação com a cidade através de exercícios experimentais para revelar potenciais ocultos do espaço. Ao tornar-se um observador ativo da situação urbana, a arte performativa torna-se tanto um caminho de descoberta como uma medida de análise. Para descobrir o espírito do espaço, foram criados três exercícios para ajudar os participantes a assimilar o espaço e a analisá-lo como observadores ativos. Ao criar situações que utilizam estímulos sensoriais, tais como elementos visuais, auditivos e atmosféricos em espaços públicos, torna-se possível descobrir o ambiente através da perceção individual. A investigação envolve também seguir a serendipidade para descobrir algo sem o procurar. A investigação baseia-se na perceção pessoal da cidade e num convite a uma versão do espaço que pode ser compreendida de forma diferente e direta. O primeiro passo consiste em compreender um lugar para descobrir o seu potencial e criar uma atmosfera segura, tanto mental como fisicamente. Os resultados do estudo sugerem que práticas experimentais efémeras proporcionam uma visão mais profunda das características dos espaços urbanos, permitindo a criação de arte performativa. O corpo humano descobre não só a cidade, mas também a si próprio. As conclusões destacam o valor de uma abordagem experimental ao ambiente, considerando os seus aspetos estruturais, sociais, ecológicos e históricos. Esta abordagem combina elementos inesperados para criar situações abstratas, demonstrando que a imaginação pode servir como uma forma ilimitada de aprendizagem e criação.

***Palavras-chave**:* Arte Performativa; Espaço Público; Genius Loci (Espírito do Lugar); Práticas Efémeras; Metodologia Experimental; Análise Espacial, Investigação baseada na prática, urbanismo experimental, investigação baseada na performance;

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1. Introduction

City - public space s. performance art - the body

Every city has its own pattern, which is depicted in various ways on maps; this pattern influences the movement, thinking, walking, behaving and expressing. This pattern, which varies significantly from city to city, depends on geographical, social, economic and functional factors. The pace of the city shapes human, that is why, on a street where vehicles are moving quickly, human body automatically walk faster. Walking slowly alongside fast-moving cars is more difficult than keeping pace with them. This imposes pace and speed in certain parts of the city. In public spaces, where there is constant movement, the human body moves in the direction of that speed.

Nowadays, the dominant approach is *oculocentrism* (focusing primarily on stimulating the sense of sight). The way of looking at things can have a significant impact on perceiving the city. A path in the city should not only serve a functional purpose, but also surprise, amaze and inspire, creating something new for thinking, walking, living, evolution and development. The way of seeing and looking at things has been changing ever since technology began to develop, and the mobile phone has become an everyday tool. Perception has been changing for about 20 years now, since technology was not yet in everyone's pocket, which is why this is already a subject of discussion.

Performance art, when combined with urban structures, offers the chance to discover surprises hidden within the city and within the body; it also fosters a sensitivity to details that were previously overlooked. When experiencing the city, it is often important to consider how one views it.

Based on Robyn Brentano's (2002) definition, there is considerable scope for understanding and interpreting performance art:

> *The term **"performance art"** first appeared around 1970 to describe the ephemeral, time-based, and process-oriented work of conceptual ("body") and feminist artists that was emerging at the time. It was also applied retrospectively to Happenings, Fluxus events, and other intermedia performances from the 1960s. Over the past thirty-five years, many styles and modes of performance have evolved, from private, introspective investigations to ordinary routines of everyday life, cathartic rituals and trials of endurance, site-specific environmental transformations, technically sophisticated multimedia productions, autobiographically-based cabaret-style performance, and large-scale, community-based projects designed to serve as a source of social and*

> *political empowerment. [...] What has come to be called performance art [...] has taken myriad forms, a result of its interdisciplinary nature (drawing from painting, sculpture, dance, theater, music, poetry, cinema, and video) and disparate influences, including [...] the Futurists, Dadaists, Constructivists, Surrealists, Abstract Expressionism, performance and art traditions of Native American and non-European cultures, feminism, new communications technologies, and popular forms such as cabaret, the music hall, vaudeville, the circus, athletic events, puppetry, parades, and public spectacles.* (Schechner, R. 2002: 159).

Genius Loci **as the guardian spirit of a place**

The term 'Genius Loci' dates back to ancient mythology, where it referred to a general concept of something or someone - sometimes even taking human form, that inhabits a particular place. These beliefs were closely tied to the manifestations and will of nature, with the focus of such beliefs centered on the forces of nature. (Stepanchuk 2020: 2) This is a concept that describes the characteristics of a place, its relationships, and its impact on human.

Historical connection to the city of Porto

Even the city of Porto has its roots in the worship of nature, the earth goddess, and local spirits, as early as the 5th century BCE, this knowledge and these practices were widespread, even before the city was established. The cultivation of rocks, rivers, and trees, long before the city acquired its current name and form, was constantly evolving and deeply ingrained among the residents, representing one of the main currents of life there. That is why the spirit of the place reaches back to the very origins of the territory itself, to the first steps of settlement. Today, exploring this phenomenon in urban spaces serves other purposes, it can be used to breathe new life into historical spaces.

From the 5th century BCE to the 5th century CE - a period spanning nearly 1,000 years - local cults were practiced in the area that is now the city of Porto. Following history and ancient traditions, engaging with the space as it unfolded during the development of the Portuguese state. Connecting with the 15th century, when the greatest discoveries allowed Portuguese explorers to travel the world, a time of discoveries and unexpected encounters as they ventured into the unknown. Just as in these explorations, following the history and culture of Portugal will be a **journey into the unknown, and the discoveries will also be a source of surprise**.

The name **Movement PERFORTO** is a combination of the words "performance" and the name of the city of Porto. It is intended to be an experimental research project - a performance

taking place in Porto's public spaces. As the city is in motion, so too does the body move under the city's influence. The aim is to unleash an impulse, an inspiration to act, and to encourage residents and visitors to view the city through their own bodies.

I. Research question

The main research question is:

How can Performance Art be used to discover and reveal Genius Loci the spirit of a place in public space?

In order to find *Genius Loci*, are created an exercises for first steps of exploration. Performance art in this research is as method to exploring the city structures and social environment, but also creating an visual ephemeral installation in the urban space.

OBJECTIVES of the research

1. Analyzing the public space to transform into a safe and comfortable space for integration, memory-making, and socializing.

2. Experimenting urban structures and the human body to surprise, discover and provide new experiences.

3. Better understanding of how the body behaves in public space and whether this can be changed to make the space safer.

4. Searching for ways to change, utopian solutions to make public space a common place for meeting and communication.

5. Observing the body through performance as a tool, understanding space, discovering performance as analysis - charting a course to follow, exploring the potential of space.

6. To discover some surprise in public space, there is a need to experiment finding out the limits and pushing slowly the boundaries

7. To gain more information about the city and the body to find a new path of discovery

8. Searching for urban corporeality

2. Body as a reflection - methodology

Experimenting with urban structures through performance has become a way of exploring on multiple levels that are not visible at first glance. The research focuses on the relationship between the human body and urban structures. It involves discovering the body within urban space and exploring the city through the body itself. Urban space influences a human being's mental and physical health, as well as their reactions and behaviors - the more time is spend in a given space, the stronger its influence (Adli, 2017). Landry's quote from the book '*The Art of City Making'* provided the inspiration to look at urban space in artistic way.

> *Planners, engineers, business people and social workers could all benefit from seeing their worlds through the eyes of artists (...) Furthermore, it ignores that increasingly it is the marriage between scientific and artistic creativity that is driving the development of new products and services* (Landry, 2006: 252)

Observation through performance as a body serving to understand space, and the exploration of performance as a form of analysis and the discovery of space's potential. To uncover the surprising aspects of public space, experimentation is required: finding boundaries and slowly shifting them, discovering them in order to transcend them.

The field of study known as psychogeography refers to artistic research, which should also be understood as a contribution to methodology. Further steps in the exploration of the space were taken through the article 'Psychogeography Today: Art, Space, Revolution?'(2015), which examines this field of research in greater detail. According to the definition provided by Debord in 2002, this branch of science deals with the *precise laws and effects of the geographical environment*. The investigation of spaces takes into account their *direct influence on the psychological behaviour of individuals*. In this context, reference should be made to the remarks by Adamek-Schyma (2015: 414).

Experimental research – Artistic practice is the method and content of research

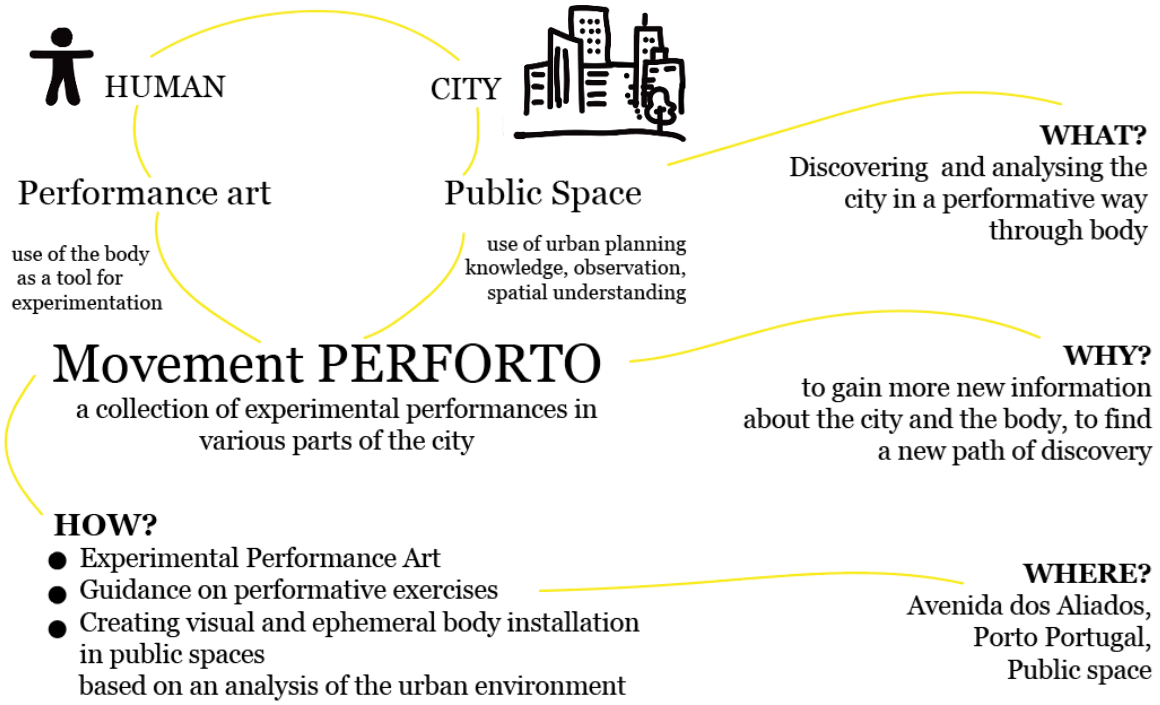


Figure 1 *Research methodology mind map, 2026*

The main driving factor behind this research is to explore the city of Porto and the use of the human body to experiment with the self and public space in a performative way.

The main objective is to create a balance of the situation or contrast of the current space in order to discover and find the spirit of the place (*Genius Loci*).

In search of the city's fleeting moments. Using the body to evoke and generate a different kind of energy through one's presence, the power of gesture, and the context of time (day, night). Transforming space through clothing, provoking through the body, and seeking out the ephemeral. Exploring possibilities through new experiences related to the city, an object, or a person present there. The city of Porto, which, due to its rich cultural, historical, and architectural heritage, provides the perfect setting for this theme. A desire to get to know the city just as one gets to know a human being: its past, stories, character, secrets, and surprises.

Discovering the different facets of urban spaces, both beautiful and dark. Through the experience of this city, there is a chance to get closer to the truth and knowledge, hidden and waiting to be discovered.

The basis of this research is data gathering, primarily through literature, as well as data collection via performative activities (meditative and experimental), and the documentation of experiences and discoveries related to these practices. Each of these stages is carried out in parallel, that is, one experiment follows another, depending on the final outcomes, or the absence of an outcome is also a finding. The focus is on the structures of the city of Porto as a stage for performative expression.

Performance art as a method for investigating urban structures

as **visual and ephemeral situations and body installation in public spaces.**

Intensive performative observation creates an opportunity to use the space for **thinking in a different way.**

Practices to outline structures and atmosphere, using the landmarks and characteristics of the place as a **visual active observer.**

To explore the nature of space, three exercises have been devised to help the human body engage with space and analyse it from the perspective of an active observer. An abstract approach to spatial analysis and structures. Achieving balance through contrasts in color, movement, and costumes to balancing situations in relation to space. Space and the audience define the character of the performance. Every place can be perceived as a stage. The performance as a tool for analysis, a performance describing a place, a performance to balancing situation, a performance exploring the boundaries of space, giving a place new meaning, discovering its potential, and delving into the ***genius loci***.

Conclusions regarding the method: surprise and the unknown, sparking curiosity, beginning to perceive from a different perspective, appreciation of objects, self-expression, finding one's own way of communicating, experience, experimentation. Demonstrating a fast and easy way to perceive, feel, devote more time to, and observe space and the body.

The research is based on a subjective perception of the city and an invitation to a version of space that can be understood differently and directly. The first steps in understanding a place are crucial for discovering its potential and creating a safe atmosphere, both mentally and physically.

Human body reflecting space versus space reflecting the movements of the human body = experiments

Texts and theories on the connections of performance in the public space, as taken saw to shape the imagination. Mention of the important Genius Loci, as a utopian search for something one doesn't know will be found ***Serendipity*** [1]. Looking at space from a different perspective as a main aim. Accessing different points of view to combine aspects and create an story about the space.

The study is based on the performer artist '*Marina Abramović Method*,' developed by one of the leading artists in her field. Her practice focuses on exploring the body and being present within it, as well as on conscious sensation. One example is her 1979 performance *The Brick*, in which she and Ulay used their bodies to highlight the shadows and light appearing in the city. A form of adapting to the characteristics of the place. In reference to this theme, the work of artist Francis Alÿs, who creates performances that connect the body with the city, provided an impetus to reflect on the use of children's imagination and the exploration not only of themselves but also of what is happening around. In his work, the artist emphasizes that the process and the concept are more important than the final result.

The artist reveals their way of seeing, perceiving, feeling, and expressing themselves without words. *The artist presents a new model of humanity, which is often a model of* ***the human being of the future.*** Evoking a provocation of a given situation toward nature or humanity, which has been shaped by experience or decisions. Artist *can convey* ***important truths about the world*** *to the audience* (Gołaszewska 1986: 37) The viewer influences the artist in a beneficial way, suggesting new paths for their development. Contact with society, interaction, and exchange with the audience or the viewers of a given work of art are significant.

> *In a performative environment, the bodymind is imaginatively removed from the lived world, but asked to refer to engagement in that world in oder* ***to create another, imaginary world.*** (Hope 2013: 144)

Regarding the creation of an imaginary world, inspiration from the character of Carroll, Lewis *Alice in Wonderland* (2009) assisted me. As a way of identifying with the character.

[1] **Serendipity**[1](*is the faculty or phenomenon of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for*)

While performing in my imagination, my body and mind fell down the rabbit hole, landing in a world where anything was possible and time stretched out, where the impossible or unimaginable was an everyday task to be accomplished.

Own perspective used for analysing the space as: resident, city planner, performer artist, tourist, city guide of the historical part of Porto, white women, student, European;

This paper presents:

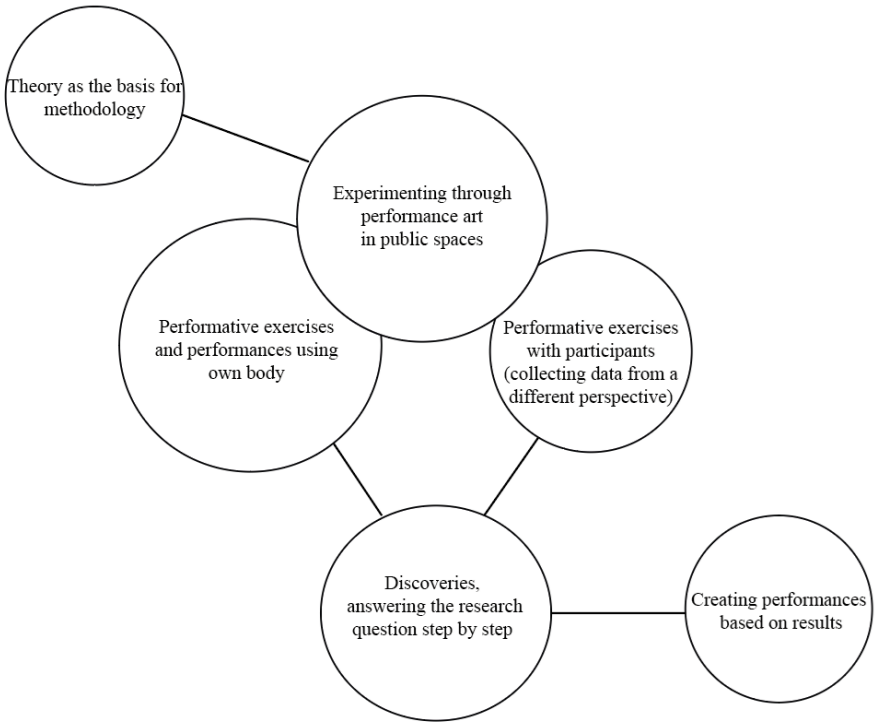


Figure 2 *Research diagram (own illustration) 2026*

According to the Publication *PERFORMANCE STUDIES An introduction* (2002) the functions of performance are:

1. to entertain

2. to create beauty

3. to mark or change identity

4. to make or foster community

5. to heal

6. to teach or persuade

7. to deal with the sacred and the demonic (Schechner, R. 2002: 46).

In conducting this research, as I explored the fields of performance, thematic development, and personal growth as a researcher, all of the points mentioned above were approached.

One point mentions is that performance could have form of healing, that body could be a center of healing. Body not only the mind.

> ***Framing the body as asite or 'way of knowing'*** *(…) co-occurring aesthetic and enquiry process occurs essentially* ***through embodies action****.* (Landy 2013: 50)
>
> *In leading with the body and in working through a postmodern world view of multiplicities, metaphors and mutualities, we seek knowledge through our full expressive instrument.* (Landy 2013: 56) it that so, the author indicated that to do so *the researcher should be not only the observer but also a performer.*

The article by Debra Kalmanowitz raises the question of whether fiction can be considered truth, which makes the power of imagination a far more potent research tool. The way an experience is explained is also a key part of the process, so even if a story seems fictional, it reflects genuine emotions. Fiction is a way to depict an experience or express an idea.

> *In fact, just like in prayer, frequently the use of graphic language, poetry, metaphor or image describe experiences that cannot adequately otherwise be conveyed*. (Kalmanowitz 2013: 38)

PERFORMATIVITY Spontaneous use of an object in semi-private space (FBAUP) - Using action to start exploring space



Figure 3 *Workshop Performativity MADEP, 3.10.2024 FBAUP, Photography: Heper Sayar*

Attending the PERFORMATIVITY Workshop at the University of Porto, Faculty of Fine Arts (Faculdade de Belas Artes) regarding a Project for the Master of Art & Design for the Public Space (MADEP). Combination, two objects with different form, function and color, created, short performative action. Accentuating the space through the color yellow. The aim was to use the given open space, as well as the objects found in it. The photo show the results of spontaneous activities during the workshop.

The first performative action is an example of using an object found directly in the space to create a situation and generate a story around the discovered materials. The yellow color became an impulse - a strong visual contrast to the grey, is very present in urban structures. The beginning of the use of the color yellow in public spaces. It is associated with positive aspects, such as lightness and brightness.

Location: open space on the campus of the University of Porto
Date: October 3, 2024 Time: 7 minutes
Objects used: golden sluice filled with water, rusty gate

Photography: Heper Sayar



Figure 4 *Workshop Performativity MADEP, 3.10.2024 FBAUP, Photography: Heper Sayar*

> *The world of supermodernity does not exactly match the one in which we believe we live, for we live in a world that we have not yet learned to look at.* ***We have to relearn to think about space.*** (Augé 2012: 46)

Performing the Shelter

The initial experiments involved a body in space, this one is an example of adding an object that was first brought to the area.

Introduction of an additional element (ephemeral visual impact on the space)

Shelter as a place to hide, to be safe, to be at home. A performance in Fontainhas, Porto, showing that a wall alone can provide safety in a physical and psychological sense. A metaphorical persuasion of shelter and the creation of an ephemeral private space in the open. A fictional wall as a place to live, rather than a fence. Performance, then the wall played an important role. As a protection against falling, due to the several-meter-high valley on the other side. By building a makeshift wall, made of yellow tape, it protected human from falling and gave the security to walk over the railing without feeling more fearful than without it.

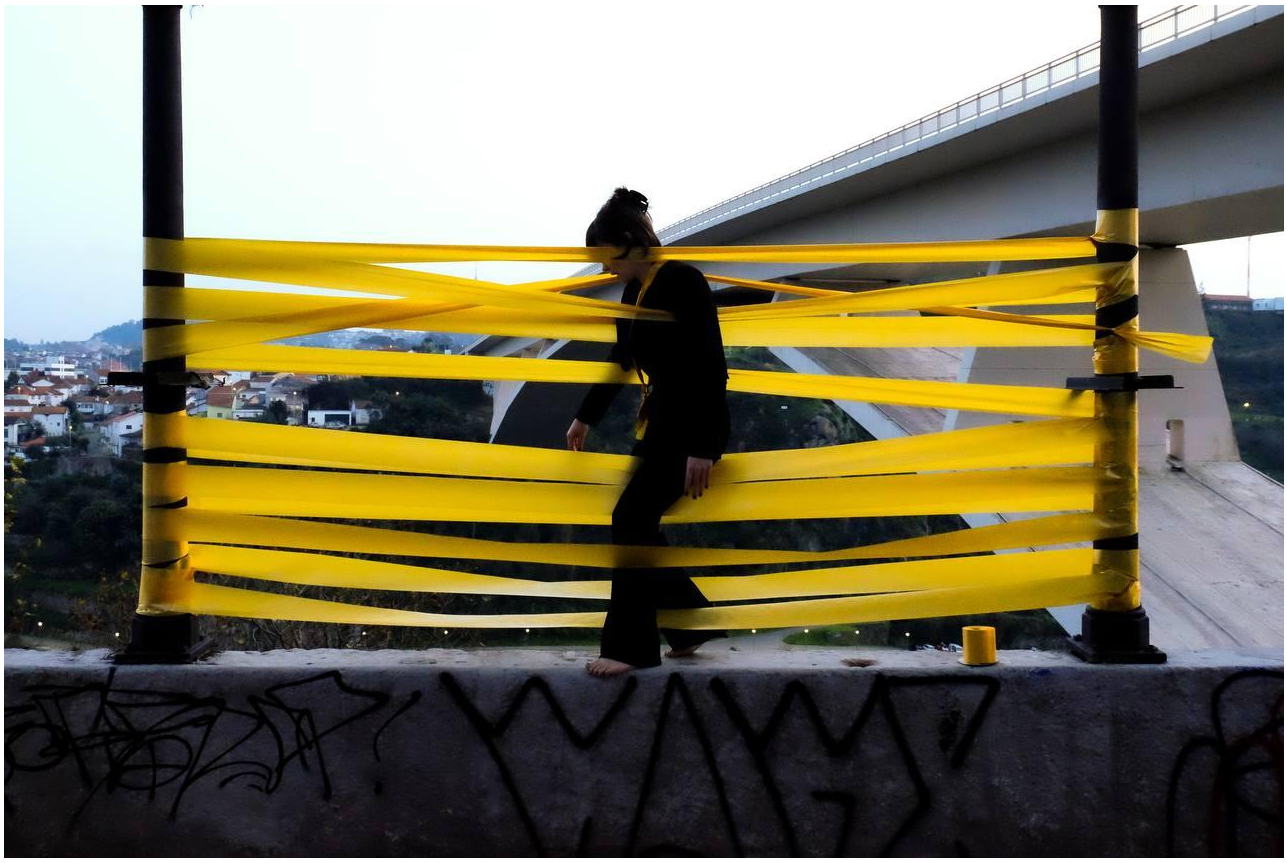


Figure 5 *Performing the Shelter, 28.11.2024, Fontainhas, Photography: Heper Sayar*

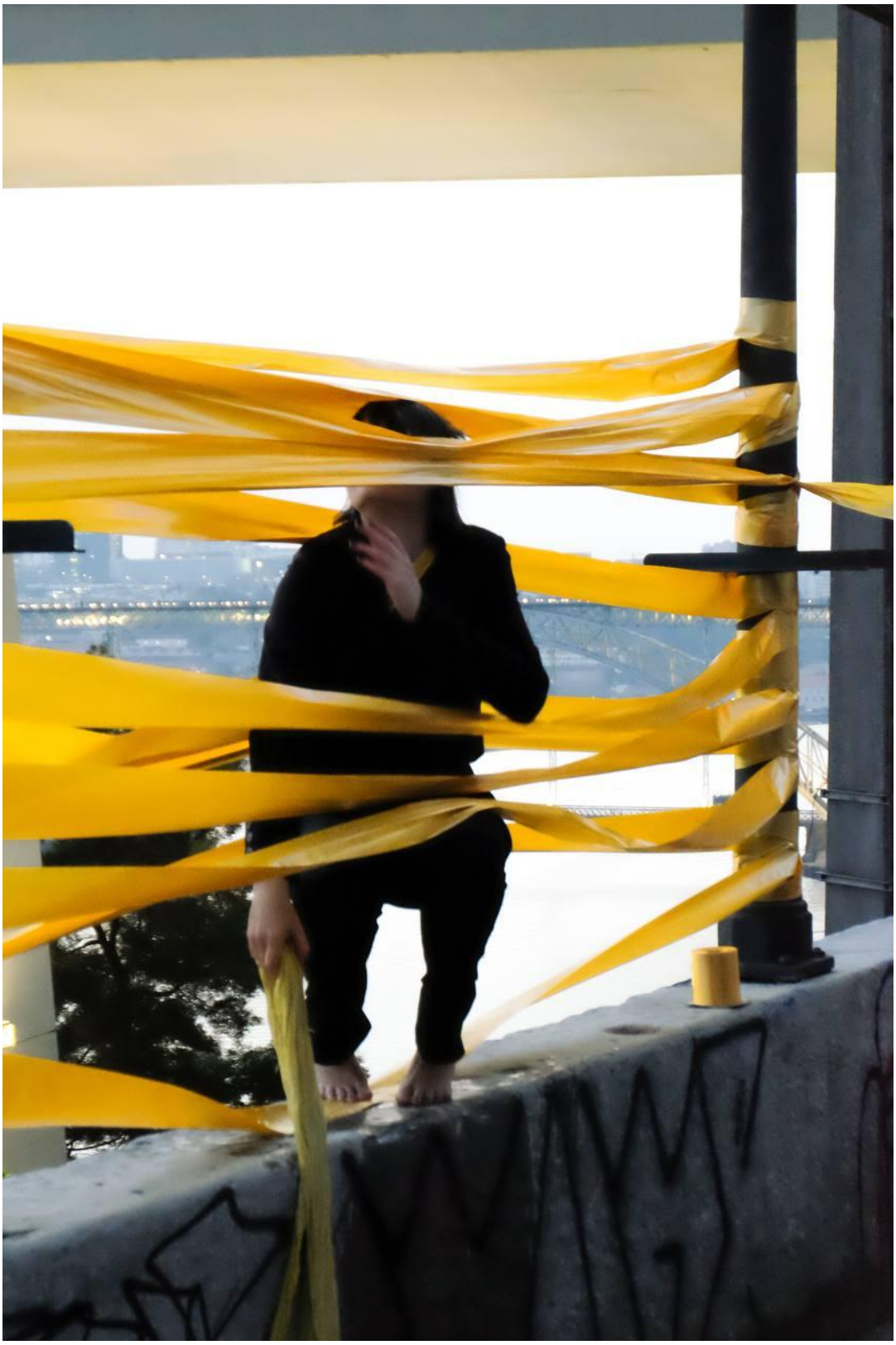


Figure 6 *Performing the Shelter, 28.11.2024, Fontainhas, Photography: Heper Sayar*

The structure supported my body, it was both a safeguard and a danger at the same time. Without that structure, I wouldn't have been able to stand here in this position. It allowed me to experience the view from this different perspective.

> *Performance is bodily scheme of practice. It connects the 'real' and 'unreal' the physical and symbolic, the objective and subjective, the fictive and narrative, and the verbal and gestural dimensions of the body.* (*Body and Performance* A. Madhavan 2013 :150)

I. The way of LOOKING

In Juhani Pallasmaa's book *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, there is a discussion about the development of our senses and the way we saw and looked in the past. According to Pallasmaa (2012) in our current *technological culture*, the senses are separated, even organized, such that sight and hearing can be used daily, while the rest are relegated to the private sphere or deemed incompatible with cultural codes.

> *There is no doubt that our technological culture has further organized and separated our senses. Sight and hearing are now the privileged social senses, while the other three are considered archaic sensory remnants serving only private functions, usually weakened by cultural codes.* (Pallasmaa, 2012: 22)

The book also includes a philosophical reflection by David Michael Levin, according to which the visual essence requires critical viewing and perception.

> *I believe that we must confront the hegemony of sight- the ocularcentrism of our culture. I believe that we must critically reexamine the way of seeing that dominates today's world. We urgently need a diagnosis of the psychosocial pathology of everyday vision and* ***a critical understanding of ourselves as visual beings.*** (Pallasmaa, 2012: 24)
>
> *The dominance of sight and the suppression of other senses push us towards exclusion, isolation, and superficiality. The art of the eye has certainly produced imposing and thought-provoking constructions, but it has by no means made it easier for humans to take root in the world.* (Pallasmaa, 2012: 26)

Physiological and psychological studies have proven that sight is one of the most important human senses. Due to the rapid technological advancements that have become part of everyday life in the 21st century, the eye is becoming increasingly isolated from the other senses. In fact, there is a strong dominance and focus on the visual realm alone, which

ultimately disrupts the basic perceptual system, leading to a *sense of distance and alienation from the world*. (Pallasmaa 2012: 49)

> *Our bodies and movements constantly interact with the environment; the world and the individual constantly inform and redefine one another. The perception of the body and the image of the world merge into a single, continuous existential experience;* (Pallasmaa 2012: 50)

The author emphasizes that the human body and the environment in which it exists in time and space are coherent, a unity, it is an interconnected form of existence.

> ***Architecture is, in a significant way, an extension of nature in the man-made world****; it provides material for perception and a horizon for experiencing and understanding the world. It is not an isolated and self-sufficient artifact; it directs our attention and existential experience toward broader horizons*. (Pallasmaa 2012: 51)

Architectural development should contribute to a balance between humans and nature, serving as both a transformation and a refuge for humanity.

> *The world is reflected in the body, and the body, in turn, is projected onto the world. We remember things in equal measure thanks to our bodies, our nervous systems, and our brains.* (Pallasmaa 2012: 55)
>
> *The eye is the sense of distance and separation, while touch is the sense of closeness, intimacy, and tenderness. The eye examines, controls, and observes, whereas touch brings us closer and caresses.*
>
> *During intense emotional experiences, we tend to shut out the distancing sense of sight: we close our eyes when we dream, listen to music, or caress our loved ones.* ***Deep shade and darkness are essential to us*** *because they blur our visual focus, render depth and distance ambiguous, and* ***activate unconscious peripheral vision and tactile fantasies.*** (Pallasmaa 2012: 57)

Our ears have been blinded. (Pallasmaa 2012: 63)

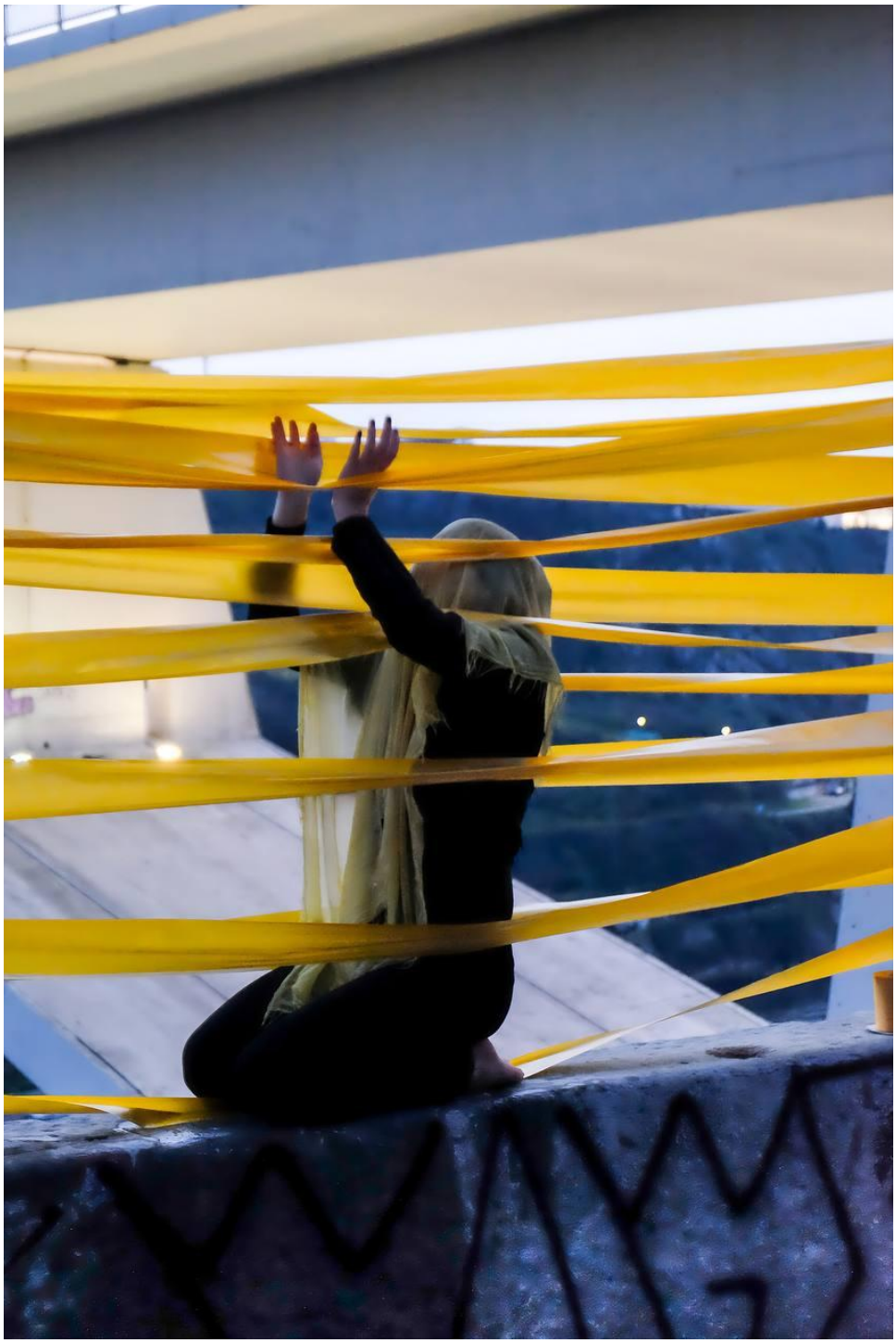


Figure 7 *Performing the Shelter, 28.11.2024, Fontainhas, Photography: Heper Sayar*

Shadows give shape and life to objects placed in the light. They also create a space where fantasies and dreams take root. (Pallasmaa 2012: 58)

> *Imagination and dreams are stimulated by diffused light and shadow. For a thought to become clear, one's focus must be blurred: thoughts flow freely thanks to a gaze that is unfocused and not fixed on anything in particular.* (Pallasmaa 2012: 58)
>
> *Equal bright light paralyzes the imagination in the same way that the homogenization of space weakens the experience of being and erases the sense of a specific place. The human eye is almost perfectly attuned to perceiving twilight, not bright daylight. Fog and twilight stimulate the imagination, making visual images uncertain and ambiguous;* (Pallasmaa 2012: 58)

Nowadays, the problem in the world is a sense of detachment and getting lost in a rapidly changing, confusing world where technology, images, and information consumed via devices cannot be a source of trust. The present moment is real, it is what we see, hear, and can sense through taste, smell, and touch throughout our entire body, not just the sense of sight, which can be easily manipulated.

> *Every city has its own acoustic character, which depends on the layout and scale of its streets, as well as the dominant architectural style and the materials used. The acoustic character of a Renaissance city differs from that of a Baroque city. Unfortunately, our cities have lost any sense of acoustic character. The spaces of modern streets do not reflect sound.* (Pallasmaa 2012: 63)

Urban development has, over time, created sounds that are unpleasant to the ear. These are the sounds of speed: an unpleasant rumbling, construction work on the sidewalk around the corner, a motorcycle taking a sharp turn, cars honking, because they need to rush through the crosswalk, these are the sounds that have come to define the modern city of the 21st century. These inhuman sounds have transformed space, no wonder such spaces can be stressful or unfriendly to the human ear. No wonder we have stopped listening.

II. The way of WALKING

According to Ernesto Pujol (*Walking Art Practice*, 2018: 46), walking has an incredible significance for the imagination, both ways. To expand the possibilities of the imagination, walking is one method of doing so, meanwhile, in order to have a wonderful walk, imagination is an essential element. It is a cycle that drives one with the other. Therefore, walking is not only a means of transportation but also contributes to thinking, imagining, and creating. Thus,

based on these considerations, it can be assumed that walking is a creative tool for humans and a way of perceiving the world.

> ***Imagination is a precursor to walking.*** *In fact, imagination bookends walking practice. There's no first step without imagining the path and the journey, its travails and destinations. Even if we surrender our imagination at the portal to a path, before our first step, seeking to walk with no thought, completely open to stimuli, our imagination is what greets us after the walk, reactivated, to help us process what we experienced.*
>
> ***The walker of great imagination is an agent of cultural, political, economic, social, and environmental change****. The imagination of the walker completes the experience of the road.* ***We need a great imagination to walk through reality,*** *for reality is so vast that only our imagination can help fill what our intellect cannot encompass.* (Pujol, 2018: 46)

From an urban planning perspective and in light of the development of today's cities, urban planners are striving to make cities highly focused on the possibility of walking as the healthiest form of urban transportation, in a comfortable and safe manner. The ability to move around urban spaces on foot has become key to creating people-friendly spaces, especially in an era where human needs are being overshadowed by technological development, creating an inhuman pace of life. Therefore, drawing on urban planner and architect Jan Gehl's (*Cities for People*, 2010) concept of creating cities for people and focusing on the *human scale*, it is a key point of this research to be aware of and focus on whether public space is designed with human needs in mind, emphasizing the importance of mental and physical comfort.

With such rapid technological advancement, the ways in which imagination can be developed may change significantly or decrease compared to previous years. In a world where everything changes rapidly and is readily available, the use of imagination will become less obvious, and the practice of training and developing it through one's own mind should continue to be cultivated and promoted.

> *Walking may surprise us with what does not exist in our brains. In fact, walking may shock us with what our brains deny but suddenly experience as existing along Nature's path, questioning our civilized beliefs.* (Pujol, 2018: 41)

According to research, the practice of living in the moment of NOW has become an essential element of human existence. Awareness of the body and space has become a path to follow in order to discover the potential not only of space, but of the **body itself**. Seeking and creating what is initially invisible and imperceptible offers a moment of surprise and much more room for reaction and results. Using the body in stillness opens the door to invisible movement within the human body. Using the body as a reference point for brain allows to better **understand, process, and adapt.** Immersing in nature unlocks body's potential, and combining

this with the urban environment amplifies the stimuli that make up the narrative of place and time. These practices help immerse in the present moment. The brain processes images and information, blending them with the past and the future**, creating a personal collage of perceptions**. Being in the 'now' allows to fully experience time, space, body, and mind, and as a collective practice, it encourages **the formation of social bonds**. Walking without a destination, taking steps simply for the purpose of freeing the body - the brain does not impose a rhythm of movement if it follows the body's lead. Understanding how to improve simple activities fosters a balance between humans, nature, and evolving technology. There is a process to engage in this. This is not merely good practice, but a **natural human need and necessity for using the body.**

Technology has eliminated our need for long- distance walking. (Pujol, 2018: 1)

Walking becomes part of a human being's daily routine, something that is taken for granted and forms an integral part of everyday mobility. A child is not taught to walk; the first steps are taken independently. This stems from physical development, need and curiosity. The ability to walk is acquired at a very young age. In most cases, it is not possible to recall that moment. By the time self-awareness and memory develop, the ability to walk is already present in life. *Walking erect was one of the gestures and experiences that made us human.* (Pujol, 2018: 1)

Walking is connected to breathing; to intake of oxygen for the brain; therefore, walking contributes to the brain working more efficiently, stimulating digestion and metabolism. The Pujol underlines the fact that *post-industrial humanity walks less.* This fact means that artists must emphasize the importance of this movement. The creation of performative walks is one example and one reason why it is worth reminding of the gift that is humanity.

> *Artists are seeking to challenge our increasing urban indoor passivity, taking us outside our stasis to see, listen, think and feel – **to experience-** reconnecting with each other and Nature before it is lost.*
>
> *Artists seek to reject viewing the world only through digital images, energy-efficient windows of climate- controlled rooms, fast hybrid vehicles, mobile phones or immersion. They seek to see, hear smell, taste touch, feel, think, and remember the forgotten, to experience something through our mind and bodies (...) **To see the visible and sense the invisible seeing us**, fully experiencing through all our organs of perception – again.* (Pujol, 2018: 2)
>
> ***Artists are walking for you and me; artists are walking for us.*** (Pujol, 2018: 2)

The research focuses on mindful walking as an experience that fosters both social and cultural change. In his book, Pujol notes that walking as the way for practicing the *thinking and feeling something throught, and for* ***getting lost so as to be found.*** (Pujol, 2018: 13) The duration is changeable, the underlining the fact that even a short practice of walking could have the impact to *encapsulate the human condition.* (Pujol, 2018: 13)

This investigation draws on insights from the book *Philosophy of Walking* by Gros, Frédéric, which describes walking practices, what benefits they bring and the important role walking plays in human's lives. One of the examples was the mentioned German philosopher Friedrich Nitsche, who walked and used these practices to think and philosophize, after long hours of walking he would return home just to put thoughts on paper. Using the idea of activating the mind by walking, there was a brief observation of the space and absorbing it with an active mind of searching for information.

To develop and reflect on this research, I practiced hours-long walks from 2024 to 2026. Walking became a way for thinking, reasoning, and generating new ideas. Walking without any specific spatial destination, but rather with a mental one. I followed my body, and thoughts simply came to me on their own rhythm.

First steps: human first crawls, with development comes the first step



Figure 8 *Performing the Shelter, 28.11.2024, Fontainhas, Photography: Heper Sayar*

III. Following human needs

According to Ernesto Pujol (2018)

> ***That is the mystery of life: the meaning of life consists in that life is about life, and walking can be its metaphor. Walking can be the purest act of worship in the cult of life.*** (Pujol, 2018: 76)

Walking is not only a form of human transportation, but cultivating this activity improves the quality of life.

> *The mind - the totality of the self. Mind combines thoughts and ideas with feelings and emotions (the so-called hearts), plus memories stored in organs (the visceral), fiber and muscle. The mind is not sited only in brain.* ***The mind is as much in the finger and toe as in the brain.*** (Pujol, 2018: 144)

Considering the simplicity, it offers and the potential it has for the human body, awareness of this and the pursuit of this knowledge can allow a human to grow and discover the unknown, what lies hidden within mind and body, like a chest waiting to be opened.

Reflection

The human body is part of nature

If we consider all the elements of nature (trees, grass, animals, water etc.) and make the human being the sole representative of a space - for example, in a public space- then the human body embodies transience, life, water, and energy. If this is the case, then humans are a reflection of nature and a reflection of the human body's needs. Public spaces devoid of natural elements may not be conducive to spending extended periods of time in them. The inability to connect with nature will discourage users from frequenting these spaces or may have a harmful effect on the human body, which needs to reconnect with nature. Unconsciously, adaptation to the environment takes place, and the way behaving reflects what space is expecting or dictating.

Exercises are designed to raise awareness of the passage of time, the rhythm of surroundings, and the rhythm of human bodies - before, during, and after. The change allows to discover and reveal the unseeing. The practices are intended to make the awareness of time, the tempo of a given place, and the rhythm of human bodies - before, during, and after. This transformation allows to discover and reveal what is invisible. There is also the opposite situation: a space that absorbs the pace and rhythm of being within it. The movement of human,

animals (if present), human-made objects (cars, subways, buses), and nature (weather, time of day, month, year) causes **space to change and like a living organism.** It adapts to current needs, times, and modes of use. The function of space should be more open to expression, and activities in public space should expand further to utilize the space while maintaining safety. Focusing on the present moment provides a sense of fulfillment, and the brain ensures comfort and sends safety signals. Focusing on being and becoming aware of one's existence on a scale (outdoors) such as public space. The combination of human creations (buildings, paths, transportation) and natural elements (trees, wind, sky, birds) makes public space an incredible place to practice this. Furthermore, even more so than in buildings, at home, or in institutions, human as part of nature can reconnect with it: breathe fresh air and spend time outdoors.

The combination of performance art with public spaces gives life true meaning. It is the perfect fusion of human nature and a mindful body. A moment of collectively being oneself while simultaneously acknowledging others. The aim of this research is to ensure safety and well-being, but also to cultivate a sense of security within the mind. These practices are not intended solely for the moment but can be applied in daily life and passed on from human to human. This method and artistic approach are taking small steps toward a **better quality of being human.** Practicing what it means to be human and cherishing life through walks, combined with suitable locations, would create the ideal conditions for being human in cities.

3.Active observer the Fonte dos Aliados – entering and exploring

I. Performative analysis of a spatial situation

> *Within the wider questions of what constitutes a city and for whose well-being it is produced, are questions of public space, urban design, and the articulation of the public realm; if art is socially beneficial, it is in the extent to which it addresses the needs of urban dwellers - by liberating their imaginations, contributing to the design of public spaces, and initiating social critism to articular the public realm – that such benefits can be identified.* (Miles, Malcolm, 1997. *Art, Space and the City: Public Art and Urban Futures*. :189)

Urban corporeality

A search for similarities with the human body, or contrasts

The focus is on **Avenida dos Aliados (XX century)**, the centre of Porto, historically and culturally significant with iconic structures, the Câmara Municipal do Porto town hall with clock tower, and the vast square where important city events such as concerts and demonstrations take place. In recent years, the place has witnessed many structural, functional and cultural-economic transformations. A place regarded as the voice of the city or described as the heart of the city. (Go Oporto, Tourism Guide 2026)

The first aim was to explore the functions of this place and examine it as an urban landmark **Fonte dos Aliados**. The curiosity aroused by this place and its location raises certain questions. At first glance, the project blends into the city center, hidden among the few trees on the square. As an observer of the city, this water feature was initially invisible for the first sight. The desire to learn more grew stronger.

Adli Mazda's book *'Stress and the City'*, bases its research on the fusion of urbanism and neuroscience, from which emerges neurourbanism. This new science field focuses on how urban space affects human mental health. By focusing on this aspect as well, the intention was also to be aware of the direction in which the sensation or experience of space is read.

Performative study of the current urban situation - entering the space, discovering the space in a different way as an active observer. Three exercises were created to understand a given public space as an ***active observer*** of a given spatial situation. The exercises consisted of sharpening the senses by separating them, creating a 30-minute blending into the space by slowly pushing the boundaries of space use.

Absorption of spatial information: **Sunday, January 12, 2025 17:17-17:53 (36 minutes)**

Due to the timing, it was possible to observe space during the day and a short time at night. Two times of the day were indicated in the analysis, which is a very important factor to have the ability to capture different atmospheres in a short time of study. These exercises were created to understand, to enter the atmosphere of a given space situation. Through intensive observation over a short period of time and by taking unconventional approaches, an opportunity is created to interact with the space and view it from a different perspective. The aim of this interaction is to present the space in a new light, highlighting its structure and atmosphere by making use of the features and distinctive elements of the place.

Using the body to sense a given situation, one of the prevailing atmospheres in this place. This can be seen as an experiment exploring a specific structure and atmosphere, involving the recording of their characteristics and the documentation of data on paper as urban situation unfold. A live analysis presented in a form visible to the public within the space. Transforming ordinary (typical) behaviours in the square to create a new atmosphere, or transforming them on a small scale in relation to the square as a whole – on a large scale. A good starting point is to blend into the public space by transforming it or adding an element to it, whilst taking into account the realities of its current state. Blending into the space for 36 minutes to create an intense experience, without disrupting the existing situation or drastically changing it, but rather by slightly abstracting it. Using elements of the resulting space to become familiar with it. Observing current urban processes.

The exercises were designed to encourage human body to explore the city and deepen experience of the space. The 'EYE & EAR' exercise draws inspiration from the work of the performance artist Marina Abramović, who frequently uses this method in her work to give participants the opportunity to feel and experience their bodies and the space around them in a different way.

1. **EYE** (10 minutes) using only visual stimuli - colours, shapes and objects that are constantly moving and then recording the data collected. The idea is to give the brain TIME to focus on a single thing, such as creating memories, observing the urban surroundings, or observing oneself – one's body, mind and concentration. As a form of mental training that helps the mind to remember better, and physical training that allows to keep body still.



Figure 9 *EYE Exercise, 12.01.2025, Aliados Porto, Photography: Nela Hamsik & Evelina Marcinonyte*

2. **EAR** (10 minutes) using only ability to listen to the space, focusing on the sounds or other stimuli, such as a gust of wind, recognising the rhythm of the space - whether it is steady or changing - and then registering this information.
   Close your eyes- instinctively, you want to open them to see what is happening, the mind is accustomed to perceiving the outside world, to constantly looking.
   Now, only ears give a sense of security.



Figure 10 *EAR Exercise, 12.01.2025, Aliados Porto, Photography: Nela Hamsik & Evelina Marcinonyte*

Without the ability to see, body automatically goes into a state of high alert and engages all body senses at once to keep safety. The body will immediately want to see what is happening around it – which is why it is essential to cover the eyes in this exercise. It is at that moment that the mind begins to see through the eyes of memory or imagination.

3. **Walking & Object** (10 minutes)

feeling the space in a “strongly stimulating” way, walking through the space, recording data at a given moment, creating an abstract control of public space, quickly absorbing the space and focusing on what is happening in the moment - the action of the city.

Activating the body - take a walk, performative or otherwise, walk slowly or very fast, it’s up to you how you want to walk. Explore new possibilities and try to remember as much of this moment as possible, as if you were going to tell a story about what happened through your own eyes.

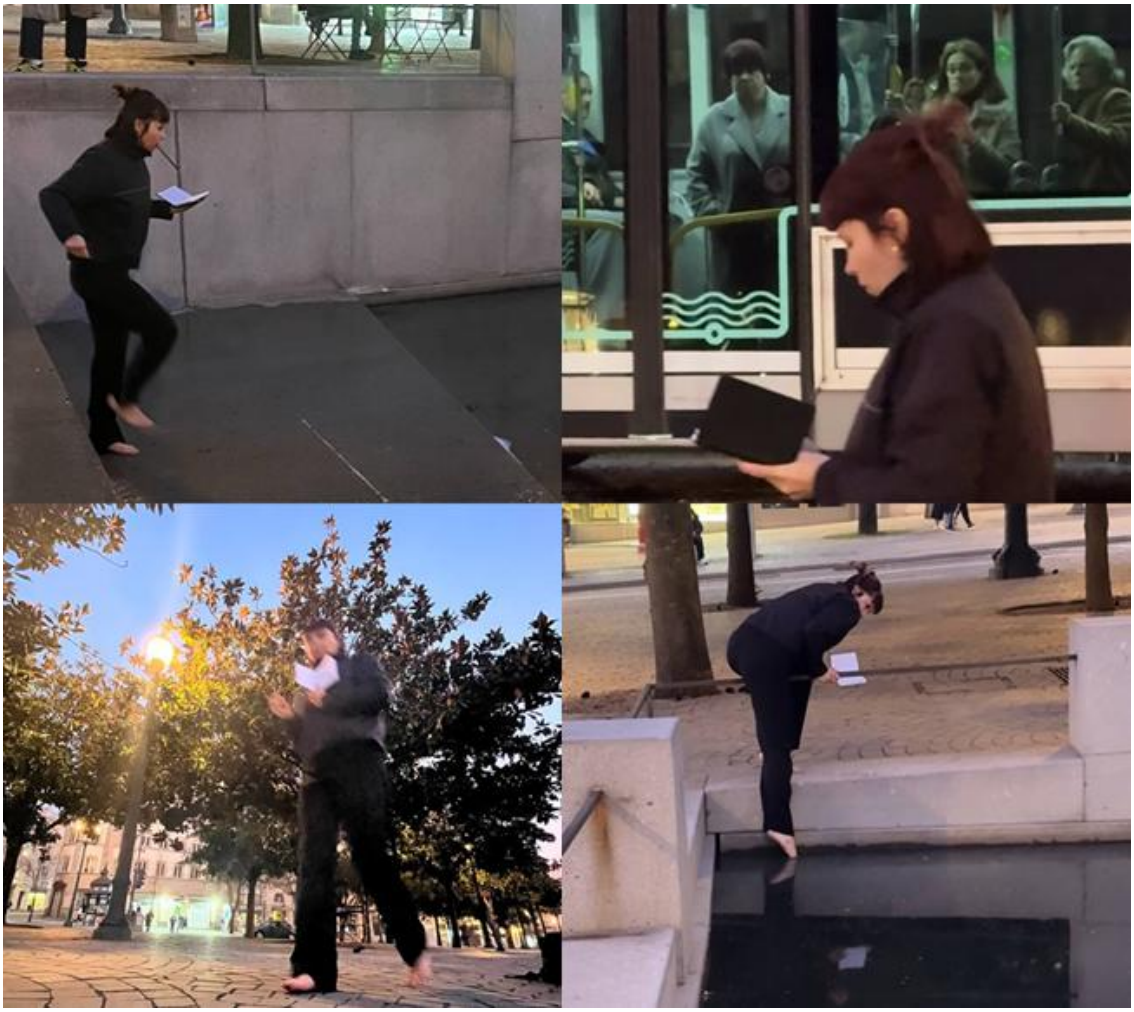


Figure 11 *Walking & Object Exercise, 12.01.2025, Aliados Porto, Photography: Nela Hamsik & Evelina Marcinonyte*

The practices and experiments aim to prepare the human body for a more active engagement with space. Static exercises allow for reflection and a different perspective on space in the context of time and situation. They increase body awareness and foster a deeper connection with public spaces.

Unlocking human potential

In the anthology *Body and Performance*, edited by Sandra Reeve, several authors contain intriguing passages on the human body in the context of performance, which allow for a deeper exploration of the mysteries hidden within the human body. The author mentions the so-called *Feldenkrais Method*, which suggests that *the ability to adapt one's posture in order to feel comfortable in a range of situations and context was a vital part of developing potency as a human being*. (Edinborough, 2011: 111). Through its ability to adapt to different situations, the human body develops its awareness, resilience, and potential.

> *It is impossible to train our muscles, skeleton and nervous system to transcend their material limitations; however we can develop ways of keeping our balance when under physical and mental strain*. (Edinborough, 2011: 112)

It is the performer himself who deliberately puts himself in an uncomfortable situation and either seeks a solution or adapts to it. It is precisely this kind of training that opens up new pathways of reasoning or new ways of thinking, precisely because of finding himself in a new situation.

> *A performer does not necessarily need significant strength or great flexibility. However, he does need to be aware of the constant process of movement and change within his experience. He needs to develop the potential to adapt to the ever-changing circumstances of the live event.* (Edinborough, 2011: 114)

The author points out that humans have an incredible ability to adapt to new situations. Through experience, humans develop the resilience to cope with and adjust to various situations. For performers, this ability is essential; resilience in the face of new situations and the ability to react quickly during a performance are crucial for authentically expressing the moment. Underlining that human resilience is not a measure of physical strength or bone density, but rather the ability to learn, recover and adapt to changing circumstances (Edinborough, 2011:113).

THE MOMENT OF NOW

> *The performer cannot shape his body to repeat the same action again and again for an audience. The performer's body is the fabric of his experience, his connection to the environment and to other people.* (Edinborough, 2013 :120)

The essence of a one-time performance lies in the awareness of the passing of time and the fact that the movement cannot be repeated. If an action is repeatable, the body and mind are prepared for it, and emotions become predictable. The truth is to surprise the body and mind in order to evoke pure emotion and experience it in the moment.

4. Fitting into the *Genius loci*

Performative City tour

> *Perhaps an alternative approach the training of the body is to investigate and isolate the socio-culturally learnt aspects of its place-memory : to familiarise the 'self'with what is based habits and movement patterns. Such an approach would allow a coscious understanding of how and why the body-self works in a particular way in space and place, and would facilitate any chosen changes as well as promote a performative understanding and appreciation of those unique elements specific to the individual.* (Hope 2013 :145)

The disappearance of "a place"

> *The definition of a "place" does not imply an abstract, geographic location, but the complete urban phenomena that determine the character and atmosphere of the location. (...) There is a loss of identity, but also the meaning of urban space which was built up throughout the history is lost. We are stuck in one-dimensional and hyper-real consumer society that excludes any symbolic or historical meaning. It is a hyperrealism of a purchase in which we are treated only as consumers, not as actors.*
>
> (Šilić, *ART IN PUBLIC SPACE: SPATIAL STRATEGIES:* 30)

Impulse: Burckhardt, Lucius (2008) *Why is landscape beautiful? The science of walking*

> ***You see what you have learned to see. The perception of landscape has to be learned.***
>
> [2](Burckhardt, 2008: 301)

Referring to Burckhard's quote encourages to take a closer look at the way of perceiving reality. The habit of looking in a certain way.

[2]Original quote from German *Man sieht, was man sehen lernte. Landschaft wahrzunehmen, muss gelernt sein. Warum ist Landschaft schön?: Die Spaziergangswissenschaft (eng. Why is landscape beautiful? The science of walking)* (Burckhardt 2008: 301)

What if the familiar and the repetitive were set aside, and began to explore space, guided by a different way of seeing?

A different way of perceiving, a fresh perspective, without prior knowledge, without preconceptions, without expectations. The first steps towards creating or transforming ordinary 'seeing', towards creating a new way of perceiving, for both the viewer and the creator.

> ***''mirroring" or mutual impact: man changes the environment and the environment changes man.*** [3](Burckhardt, 2014: 29)

The point in the research is also a curiosity about how space can affect a human being and after what time the user becomes a part of the urban environment not just a spectator. Research as a base of inspiration for more understanding the urban space.

Ways of perceiving urban structures and reflecting on ourselves

My interest in the historical and cultural background led me to become a guide in the city of Porto, recounting stories from the past and discussing cultural issues relating to the country and the city. During my research, I had the opportunity to talk about the city from my own perspective and encourage tourists to view the city in a way they had not experienced before. The chance to exchange personal thoughts with visitors from other countries allowed me to broaden my perspective on Avenida dos Aliados.

➔ The practical exercises were conducted with tourists as well as students from technical and art universities. The conclusions regarding these experiments come from Porto, Portugal; Rotterdam, the Netherlands; and Le Havre, France, 2025–2026. (see 8. Attachment).

A maximum of 5 participants should take part in the workshops, to enable to me be absolute focus of observation. The goal is to observe the changes that occur in a human body after a new impulse is sent to the brain. As an active observer, I create situations that encourage observation, both surrounding city and of the human body. Each experiment yields new insights and results. That is why it is important to record this process, so that later notice what the eye did not catch at first glance.

[3] Original quote from German *„Die Spiegelsituation- der Mensch verändert die Umwelt: und: Die Umwelt verändert den Menschen"* Wer plant die Planung?: Architektur, Politik und Mensch 2014: 29)

A 2-hour cultural and historical tour with an urban planning focus, featuring elements of performative exercises (20 minutes) - **21 May 2025, Porto**



Figure 12 *Performative tour Aliados – 5 minutes of looking, Photography: Monica Odumodu 2025*

The exercises included in the research place participants in a new situation - a new space and context to which they adapt in order to feel at ease. By practising these exercises, the body becomes more resilient to stress or crisis situations. When the brain cannot think, the body shows the way. The body automatically and quickly finds a space in which it feels safe, revealing even in small details that this space has, to some extent, contributed to the sense of security.

Observing behavior, focusing attention both during and after the exercises

For the study, humans were encouraged to try these exercises so they could gain a perspective beyond my own. These invitations are extended during a tour of Porto's historical district. As a guide and researcher, I share stories and the culture of the city, exploring how one can observe and navigate space, as well as consciously create memories and mental images. Through other eyes, thereby broadening the scope of the narrative and enhancing their capacity for spatial analysis and understanding of the human body - both individually and collectively.



Figure 13 *Performative tour Aliados – 5 minutes of walking in circle, Photography: Monica Odumodu 2025*

In some cases, a simple reaction to the exercises: such as a change in mood or a moment of reflection. Whether they wish to continue or feel comfortable, their reactions and attention also signal that such physical activity in this space is viewed positively, and that their body feels at ease in the space.

Active observation - making oneself visible in the space by remaining suspended still and absorbing the space. The brain is curious about what it sees; it becomes hungry for sensations or seeks to satisfy the sense of sight. Without sight, the brain switches the body into alert mode and registers everything to ensure the human's safety. Every movement will be registered and analysed during this brief period to determine whether it is dangerous.

To explore the boundaries of space and its significance for the Genius Loci - the spirit of place, in the pursuit of serendipity and openness to discovery. This question forms the basis of the research, yet what is crucial is openness to the effects of space and how they impact the human body. Starting with the observation of the body's reactions in public space.

I. Discovering the shape of the public realm

> *The timeless task of architecture is to* ***create corporal and living metaphors for existence that give concrete form to and structure our being in the world****. Architecture reflects, materializes, and immortalizes the ideas and images of an ideal life.* ***Buildings and cities allow us to organize, understand, and remember the formless flow of reality and - as a result - to know and remember who we are.*** *Architecture enables us to perceive and understand the dialectic of permanence and change, to settle into the world, and to situate ourselves within the continuum of culture and time.* (Pallasmaa 2012: 83)

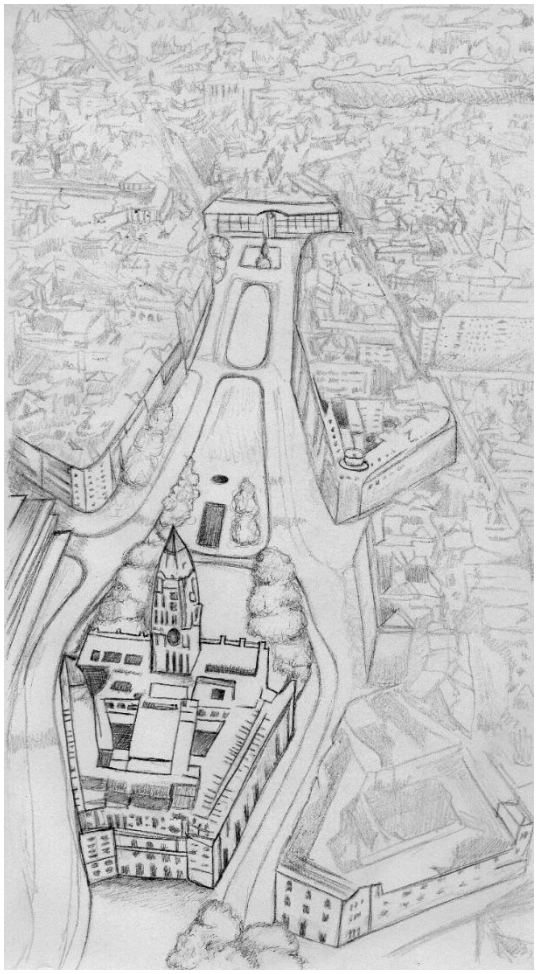


Figure 14 *An illustration showing Aliados from a bird's-eye view (original illustration, 2025)*

During an exploration of the urban landscape, findings emerged which, from a subjective perspective, gave rise to a fictional narrative grounded in reality. Shape, form, architecture and atmosphere are all taken into account, particularly in terms of how they interact with the human body and mind as they seek inspiration to exercise the imagination.

Creating an abstract map that reflects public space by combining aspects of spatial layout with its existing features landmarks[4], such as statues, significance, buildings, purpose, and atmosphere. Mapping in this way reveals one of many possible ways of understanding a given place, it does not have to be the definitive version. Understanding space using new navigation, giving it new life and spatial meaning, aids in better navigation and spatial understanding, helping find a way in public space without constantly looking at a map. Even if just for a moment, **we become explorers**. We can play a game where the city is a board filled with surprises and hidden stories waiting to be discovered. Adding own interpretations to help understand and navigate the city. It is a

[4] ***Landmarks*** *are defined as an external point of reference that helps orienting in a familiar or an unfamiliar environment.* (Bala, 2016)

unique blend of performance, the body, and the city maps and structures. Mapping as Performative Action in Space (Wolfrum 2015):

> *Performative mapping practices question traditional mapmaking for objectifying methods, and suggest instead self- reflexive methods. In so doing, performative mapping practices tend to unfix dominant knowledges of place and generate other multiple, subjective, resistant, and critical knowledges.* (Şenel 2015 :76)

Expecting unexpected

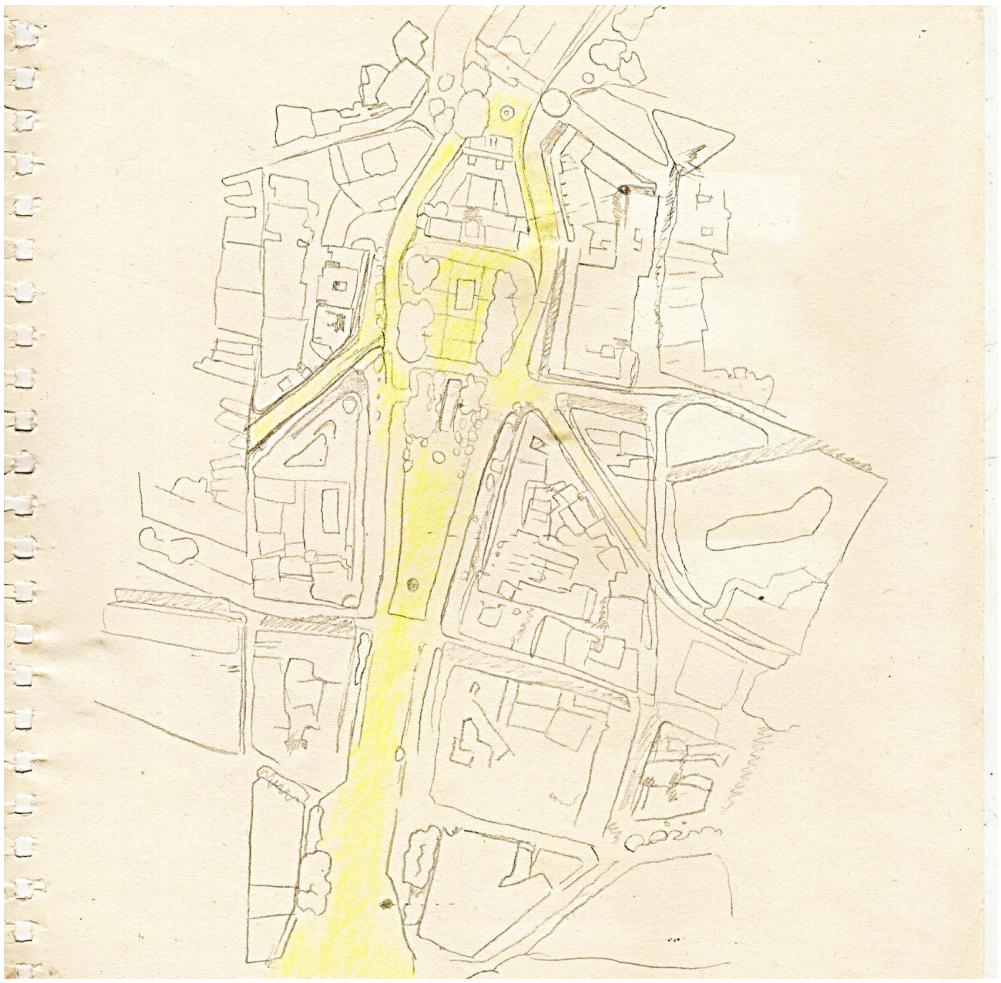


Figure 15 *Own drawing of shape of Avenida dos Aliados square 2025*

Finding the golden fish to make a wish

The square and posture of buildings resemble **a fish** - a drawing showing the architectural connection.

According to research (Wolfrum & Nikolai, 2015) it is possible to determine that, in combining the public space and urban structures with human body, performative mapping play a significant role in exploring and as by defining the public realm.

> *The **performative mapping** examples above suggest a **new understanding of place**, one that is being recreated during each observation and documentation process. This performative mapping allows the mapmaker to **engage in a place in multiple ways**, by temporarily appropriating the site, by participating in its everyday life, by communicating with others, and by **opening this place to criticism**. All these new engagemnts introduce new limits and levels of publicness to the urban space.* (Şenel 2015 :78)

> *Performative mapping practices question traditional mapmaking for objectifying methods and suggest instead self- reflexive methods. In so doing, performative mapping practices tend to unfix dominant knowledges of place and generate other multiple, subjective, resistant, and critical knowledges*. (Şenel 2015 :76)

The quotations presented serve as an additional impetus, not only for analyzing space through the body and performance, but also for using maps as another form of spatial representation with the aim of broadening the discussion or critical analysis of a given space. A cartographic encounter with a given place provides more information and allows for a deeper understanding of urban processes.

> (…) ***performative mapping may allow us to develop a sharper sense of how and what we know of a certain place.*** *As such, performative mapping produces site- and time – specific multiple knowledges. In this way, one becomes aware of knowledges produced due to different points of view and develops a critical view of authoritative and singular representations of a place.* (Şenel 2015 :76)

Since cities are constantly changing, each one serves as a record of the past, the present, and the future. Therefore, the importance of documenting them in various ways and understanding the spatial reflections of the present moment is crucial, as this will allow to consciously observe territorial, social, and economic changes.

> ***The experience of urban space is temporal**; it is not only bound to the temporality of our won existence and perception, but also related to the discontinuity and the constant change of the city. As temporality in this context is often reduced to issues such as the speed of movement, the progress of economic development, means of transport, etc., **it is important to remember that the temporal experience of a city is quite complex, and often paradoxical.*** (Primavesi 2015 :156)

Discovering the shape of the fish- Finding the golden fish to make a wish

The shape of fish is suiting to the culture of Portugal, their volumes and beginning of the city and country. The name of Portugal comes from *Portus Calle* which means a *magnificent harbour* – connection to fish.

The hidden shape of a fish in the streets and urban landscape. The character of this place is a form of 20th-century public space. Is one of the many possibilities of discovering and exploring the city, one given way to awake the city structures in the imagination's way. To make the city movable shaking and alive by itself, through history, culture and structure they could have stories, the humans could tell each other, like secrets, stories, legends, fantasy. To see the space thought own eyes and continue to inspire the eyes, ears, mind and human bodies. The maps looking is understanding, communicating with structures, following the paths, learning the way the construction, form shapes, possibilities, limits on the bigger scale. Different maps and different language and presentation of the existing.

As process of research delved deeper into search for new surprises, news leaked out that a 17th-century **Fountain of Life (*Fonte da Natividade*)** had been discovered on Avenida dos Aliados during the construction of the pink metro line in 2022. Another station to explore and understand.



Figure 16 *An illustration showing Almeida Garret (original illustration, 2026)*

Searching for Fonte da Natividade as a personal curiosity, to develop spatial imagination, an object's function, form and use. To practise imagination, create stories, understand a place, familiarise oneself with and connect to it, not only as an observer but also as a discoverer of new narratives. As an explorer of one's imagination and of pushing one's limits. As if fiction is truth, and truth is fiction. Discovering a place not only as it is seen and perceived but digging further underground and looking skyward.

Following the idea of focusing of own perception and creating the story of real with fantasy and imagination.

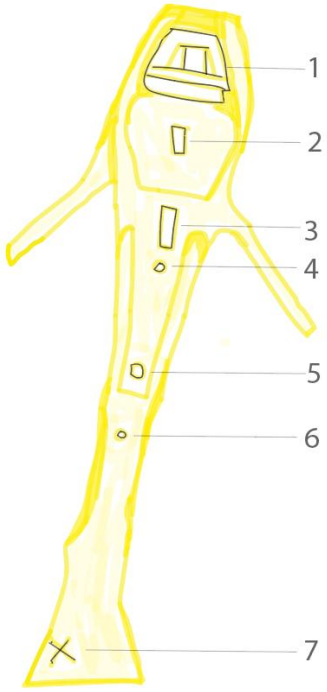


Figure 17 *Avenida dos Aliados - anatomy of a fish (own illustration)*

Fantasy based on real story - anatomy of a fish

1. Câmara Municipal do Porto - head
2. Almeida Garret - voice
3. Fonte dos Aliados - heart

   (see Performance *Collector of Dreams*)
4. Metro ventilation exhaust - lungs/gills
5. Metro ventilation exhaust - stomach
6. A Juventude Abundance - The Boys" (*A Abundância - Os Meninos* - genital organs - fertility
7. Don Pedro IV, InterContinental Porto - Palacio das Cardosas, new metro Linha rosa, - tail

X - Fonte da Natividade

5. Ephemeral visual impact on space

Diving into the realm of surrealism: Using imagination as a driving factor

In the book *Worldview of Surrealism* (1969), Krystyna Janicka gives impulses to create and reason about reality in a rather surreal way. In the quest to break the boundaries of reality and dream or imagination or to combine them. The author refers to a key figure in Surrealism, André Breton, who declared in his first manifesto of 1924 that:

> *I believe that in the future these two states, dream and java, seemingly opposite, will melt into a kind of absolute reality**, into hyperreality.*** (Janicka, 1969: 16)

Referring to this quote, the idea arose to create a kind of hybrid and in a short period of time create situations that can be compared to a dream because of its surreal theme or emphasis. Also, the quote regarding Breton's view:

> *Modern man is characterized by great mental and moral poverty, the dialectically related determinants of which are, on the one hand - the almost complete subordination to the practical requirements of life, and on the other - the almost complete abandonment of the forward-looking, creative and life-giving functions of the imagination.* (Janicka, 1969: 35)

An understanding or closer insight into the term *Imagination* confirms that it plays an important role in human life, due to its ability to release thoughts:

> *Imagination is not a gift, but 'the concept of man's mental liberation from the system of constraints that rationalist and positivist thinking creates for free thought.* (Janicka, 1969: 77)

A quote referring to perhaps why imagination is blurred in adult life, even conflicting with the rational thinking mostly used in adulthood:

> *Imagination is supposed to contribute to this "crisis of consciousness from an intellectual point of view."* (Janicka, 1969: 76)

I. Performance *Collector of Dreams*



Figure 18 *Performance Collector of Dreams, Photography: Camilla Formiconi 2025*

Location: Public space Porto, Fonte dos Aliados

Performance duration: 30 minutes, 14.06.2025 18:30-19:00

Objects: gold tape, 10 gold ballons

Photography: Camilla Formiconi

Revealing the Genius Loci - Finding a golden fish to tell the wish



Figure 19 *Performance Collector of Dreams, Photography: Camilla Formiconi 2025*

The performance aims to create a ceremony of appreciation for public space after collecting data from different periods, perspectives and from different pairs of eyes. A ceremony for a single place used in such an important location. The performance reveals the genius loci of this space or part of it, drawing also on the artist's subjective perspective. The theme is the colour of time and space, which create a narrative about the space.

Collector of the dreams as welcoming and revealing of *Genius Loci*: The meaning of dreams and metaphors of life. Careful consideration of gestures and ways of changing the atmosphere.

Telling stories without using words.

The performance is both a celebration of discovering the unique character of a place and a metaphor for importance of having dreams in life. Ballons symbolize transience, the fleeting nature of the moment and of existence. Creating the shape of a goldfish and releasing it into water as a way of making a wish.



Figure 20 *Performance Collector of Dreams, Photography: Camilla Formiconi 2025*

The reflection of the water in the fountain mirrored the town hall, just as feelings and thoughts mirror one another. A spatial reflection from a different perspective offers a new point of view and allows the human body to adapt to the space.

Entering the water as a spatial metaphor representing the heart, based on the ‘anatomy of a fish’ in a story about the goldfish created from structural elements of Aliados Square. Blowing up balloons was a way to make a wish and create the shape of a fish, which was then slowly lowered on a golden thread into the fountain’s water to bring it to life. Throwing the balloons created an optical illusion, as if the fish were being thrown into the water or fished out.

Of the ten balloons - wishes - only one remained at the end.

Each of them burst due to the strong wind and the city’s structures. It is also a metaphor for dreams and the belief that every human should have at least one dream and strive to make it come true, despite difficulties and obstacles.

When the performance took place, my dream of creating a performance in a public space in Porto came true, proving that it is worth holding on to your dreams, and that imagination helps to adapt them to personal needs.



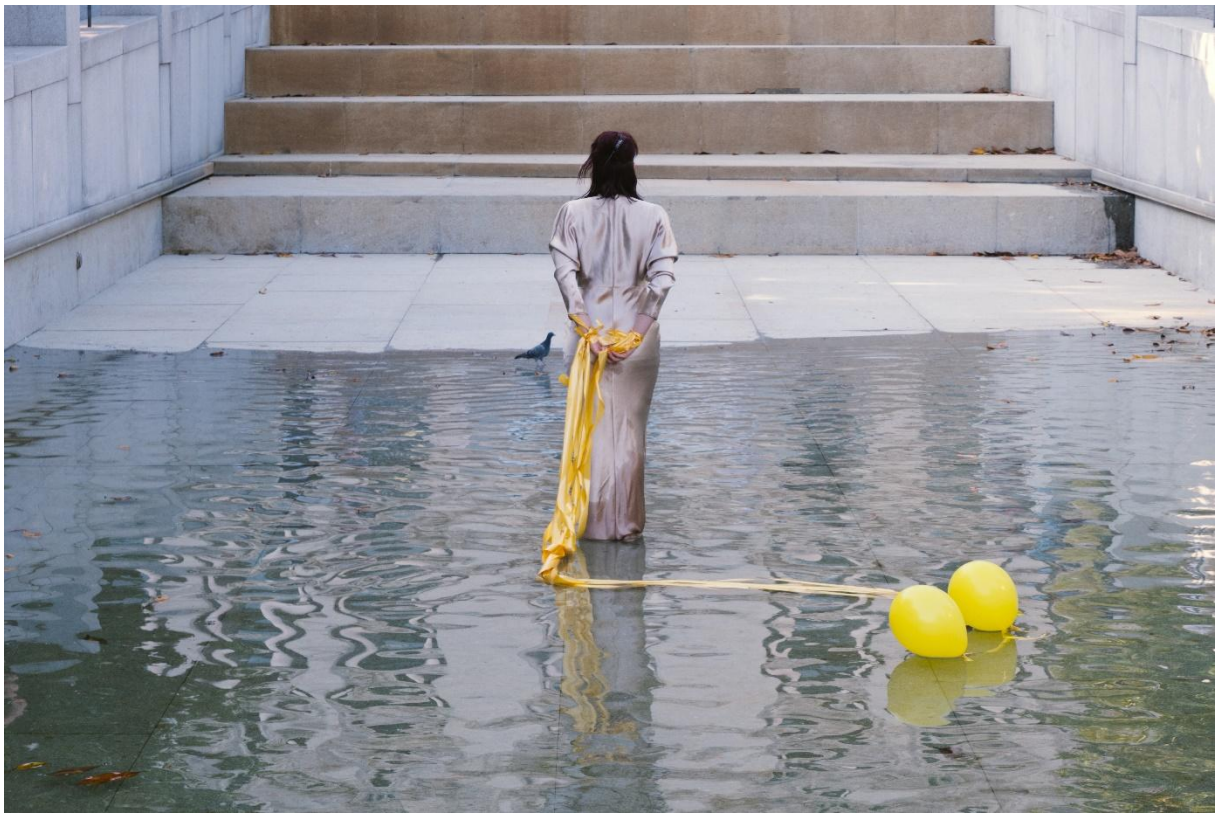


Figure 21 *Performance Collector of Dreams, Photography: Camilla Formiconi 2025*

Figure 22 *Performance Collector of Dreams, Photography: Camilla Formiconi 2025*

Body mapping

II. Performance *Swim through the Fish*

Personal reflections gathered while practicing performance art:

Speaking without saying a word, feeling naked, being completely clothed.

Being in a performance is like opening a window to emotions.

An attempt is made to establish contact and delve into a dialogue between structures, nature, and elements of the environment. The body serves here as a mediator, allowing for a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. The natural structure of water contrasts with the concrete space. This space, perceived as the voice of the city, conceals many stories and messages. Contact with the water flowing from this space, which acts as an intermediary, evokes memories and constitutes an attempt to listen to the space through the body and time.

Being simultaneously a narrator and a listener, an observer of the situation and a provocateur who inspires the creation of new stories. This experiment with the human body and space allows one to find the ***Genius Loci***, or at least a part of it, in order to discover a different narrative, find new potential in the space, better understand it, or collectively rethink it. The aim of this research is to find the potential to enhance the character of the space and its surroundings simply by adding the body.

The human body is the creator and storyteller of space.

Location: Public space Porto, Avenida dos Aliados

Performance duration: 30 minutes, 23.04.2026 18:30-19:00

Objects: gold tape, orange, golden mask

Photography: Camilla Formiconi

In the performance, a mask was used as a way to hide the identity in a place that represents the city's identity. A desire to hide in the place that is most visible in structural terms. A physical contrast to the city, hiding while becoming more visible through clothing and gestures. The golden mask as a symbol of embodying the Genius Loci. The face as a reflection, like the windows of the buildings on the square, which turn golden as the sun sets. The contrast of the divine mask, yet bare feet revealing the fragility of being human.



Figure 23 *Performance Swim through Fish- sitting at Camara Municipal, Photography: Camilla Formiconi 2026*

The photograph also references the title of the performance, namely 'Swim through Fish'. The body sits on the edge, as if at a swimming pool, ready to jump into the water. The mask serves to protect the eyes from the water. The mask, worn at the start of the performance, was removed upon entering the water at Fonte dos Aliados as a form of biological-spatial contrast. As if I were embodying a fish.



Figure 24 *Performance Swim through Fish - pulling the strings of memory, Photography: Camilla Formiconi 2026*

During the process of uncovering the 'fish-shaped structure' on Avenida dos Aliados, research revealed that a 17th-century fountain of life (*Fonte da Natividade*) had been found at Avenida dos Aliados, was excavated in 2022 and relocated. In this performance, the color yellow also symbolizes the metaphorical light of discovery. When archaeologists find themselves in a new, dark, hidden place in search of a historical treasure, they use light to find their way. They shed light on what was hidden.

Yellow as a metaphor for the light of discovery - the discovery of a place or a body, light that serves to unveil or reveal what is hidden. The performance was also a ceremony of rediscovery.

During the performance, I sat on my knees peeling orange as a symbol of the Fountain of Life (XVII), a kind of vessel of living. Sitting barefoot on my knees, when I stood up I noticed that the imprint of the floor had been left on my feet. It was the pattern of the floor. My feet were pressed firmly against the floor. A small space was imprinted on a small part of my body. An unconscious phenomenon caused by sitting. Looking at the misshapen feet, flattened against the ground, they had transformed into a tail. A fish's tail.

The place left a visible mark on my body.



Figure 25 *Performance Swim through Fish, Photography: Camilla Formiconi 2026*

And how does a place leave an invisible mark? In the form of memories? In the form of a sense of well-being? An imposed rhythm that we continue to follow? It is necessary to ask how such spaces influence and what kind of mark they leave on a human. What does it teach, inspire, or prompt to reflect on? Does it attract or repel with its shape, sound, or scent; does it enchant with its charm? Importance of understanding spatial processes.



Figure 26 *Performance Swim through Fish – standing on the 'lungs' station, Photography: Camilla Formiconi 2026*

Walking across the square, carrying a symbolic life toward the sculpture *A Abundância*/*Os Meninos* (Abundance/The Boys), as a gift and a way of nurturing the space, to draw closer to the *Genius Loci*. Various spatial situations signaled where this place is unsafe for the body or for life. In an unconscious gesture, whenever my body felt discomfort, I pulled the orange closer to me to protect it.





Figure 27 *Performance Swim through Fish, Photography: Camilla Formiconi 2026*

Figure 28 *Performance Swim through Fish, Photography: Camilla Formiconi 2026*

III. Performance *Imagine something what you never saw before* - in search of Fonte da Natividade XVII

The '*Swim through the Fish'* performance sparked the curiosity to continue this narrative, enough to prompt me to contact a group of archaeologists from Câmara Municipal do Porto (head of the fish) to find out exactly where this structure is located and what its dimensions are. I was honoured that Dra. Iva João Teles Botelho from Metro to Porto, Directorate for the Environment, Safety and Quality provided me with information about this find, describing the exact location and details. A map from 1790 appeared before my eyes, on which the exact location and form of the find were finally revealed. For so long it had existed only in my imagination. For this research, it is like finding a treasure map. This inspired me to create the performance '*Imagine something you've never seen before'* to mark the location of this early discovery, to bring the imagination to reality and introduce it into the fabric of the city, even if only for a moment.

This act serves as a reminder and a reawakening of the archaeological structure.



Figure 29 *Performance Imagine something what you never saw before, Photography: Camilla Formiconi 2026*

The performance involved tracing the outline of the fountain. It was an ephemeral mark left by the body and with the assistance of a yellow measuring device. It was a live drawing, bringing historical structures to life by adapting them to the present. The initial coordinates of the location pointed to David Rosas building, which caught my attention due to its distinctive appearance. Yellow flowers were visible on the wall. Yellow is the guiding colour of my research, and the flower is a symbol of life, as if the city itself were pointing the way to follow.



Figure 30 *Performance Imagine something what you never saw before, Photography: Camilla Formiconi 2026*



Figure 31 *Performance Imagine something what you never saw before, Photography: Camilla Formiconi 2026*



Figure 32 *Performance Imagine something what you never saw before, Photography: Camilla Formiconi 2026*



Figure 33 *Performance Imagine something what you never saw before, Photography: Camilla Formiconi 2026*



Figure 34 *Performance Imagine something what you never saw before, Photography: Camilla Formiconi 2026*

Location: Public space Porto, Avenida dos Aliados

Performance duration: 30 minutes, 05.06.2026 18:30-19:00

Objects: gold tape, yellow measuring device 7,5 meters

Photography: Camilla Formiconi



Figure 35 *Performance Imagine something what you never saw before, Photography: Camilla Formiconi 2026*

Starting with the touch of yellow flowers, I was measuring not only the fountain, but also space, time and reactions. On the walls of the building, amongst the flowers, hung photographs of clocks, which reinforced the symbolism of the performance. As I marked out the fountain, I walked backwards as a symbol of going back in time, as a gesture marking the flow of time.

An additional aspect was that the statue of Don Pedro VI faced directly towards the fountain; the details began to dawn on me step by step, and the city itself created this story. I only gave it a voice.



Figure 36 *Performance Imagine something what you never saw before, Photography: Camilla Formiconi 2026*

The final touch was was a spit of water, like a living fountain, symbolising the rebirth of the fountain as an object that continues to function. On the left side of the photograph is a map of

Aliados, showing the exact location of the performance - on the tail of the fish - and on the other side, a watch bearing the inscription ‘Alive in Time’, which fitted perfectly into the narrative of this spatial research. The use of a bottle marked ‘University of Porto’ was a symbolic moment and a confirmation that I would be speaking about this phenomenon at the university and that my performances are dedicated to this institution.

The shape of the fountain resembles a fish's tail

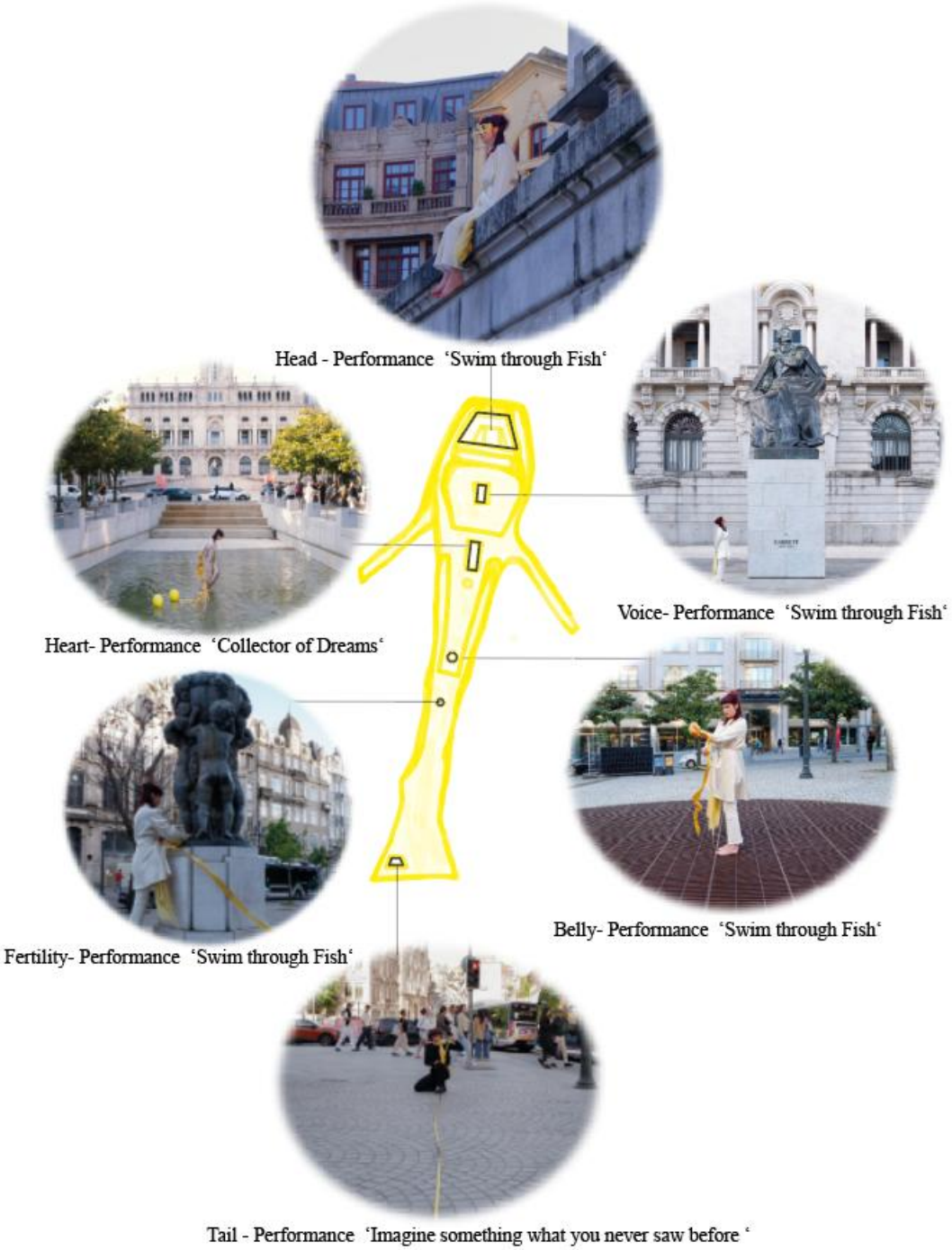


Figure 37 *Mapping through performances, Photography: Camilla Formiconi (own Illustration) 2026*

During the exploration of the urban space, findings were obtained which, from a subjective perspective, gave rise to a fictional narrative grounded in facts. The study took into account shape, form, architecture and atmosphere, as well as how these elements interact with the human body and mind in search of stimuli to spark the imagination. Exploring Fonte do Navididade as a unique point of interest, to stimulate spatial imagination and an understanding of this place, its function, form and purpose. To exercise the imagination, create stories, understand this place, become familiar with it and form a connection with it, not only as an observer, but also as a discoverer of new narratives. As an explorer of the imagination and as a human pushing their own boundaries. As if fiction were reality. Discovering a place not only as it is seen and perceived, but also delving deeper, even beneath the ground. The research on the fish comes to a temporary halt. The story may continue, and the way it is told may take various turns.

6. Conclusion

The complexity of the investigation of public spaces is concerned on various factors that can change over time: such as the time of day, night, the weather, whether it rains, the season or the audience. The present moment reflects like a mirror the space at a given moment, so during performance the space may change, briefly returning to its rhythm and mode as if nothing had happened, showing its original functionality. Exploring the space with longer meditative performative activities can only show an idea or substitute for the information found in the public space. An experimental approach to the environment to understand it structurally, socially, economically, ecologically, temporally and historically.

In further planning, exercises can be used with other visitors and taken to experience the moment. Conscious sensing to record the information that is signaled to the brain and write it down to convey the features or characteristics of a place for better understanding or simply discovery in another way. Characterizing elements gives an idea of a place without having to be there. Constructing thoughts - thinking about space in elements: situation, atmosphere, smell, visual, and auditory stimuli. Acting out a situation to explore it by entering it and exploring it by acting out the situation, **creating improvising abstract urban situation.**

Using imagination to give the situation of place and time. A construction created in the mind by combining the elements given: structure, space, and objects as additional elements: using objects that do not normally appear in space. Combining two elements that are not on the order of things, creating an abstract situation creating ***hyperreality.***

Imagination as an important key element used in this work. There are no boundaries in the incorporation of imagination, nurturing it, expanding it or playing with it. The artist in himself gives the boundary where his consciousness wants to stop or convey something. Breton mentioned that if something imagined is created then it becomes a *hyperreality*. Imagination is like a separate room in the mind and each one has a complete different size color and shape, it is important for a human's life to keep this door open.

Expressing oneself through performative acts and the use of imagination, is a form that needs to be practiced, expanded and even passed on. Imagination can be a form of learning that has no boundaries. It gives doors, windows, corridors, tunnels and even slopes of ideas for decisions that shape life, relating to a person's character and depending on the power of imagination.

- **Ephemeral experimental practices** provide deeper insight into the characteristics of urban spaces
- By becoming an **active observer of the urban situation**, performance art becomes both a path of discovery and a measure of analysis
- This approach combines unexpected elements to **create abstract situations**, demonstrating that imagination can serve as an unlimited form of learning and engagement with a place
- Reading the city through the body
- Looking and seeing through different eyes
- The creators of a city should be particularly sensitive to the atmosphere of public space
- Imagination can serve as an unlimited form of learning and engagement with a place
- This city already has an incredible story to tell, **it is up to us to open our minds to see and hear it**

This journey of discovery offers a personal approach to perceiving space, allowing to form a deeper connection with a given place, uncover its potential, and engage in a dialogue with it. The journey of research expands not only the way I perceive key issues but also reflects my growth in terms of recognizing and failing to recognize the next steps. In this paper, the actions and movements associated with discovery and experimentation are of particular importance. Getting lost, only to eventually find the way, and then losing it again, constitutes a path full of ups and downs, leading to the discovery of the results of this research. Within the framework of this experiment, I used my own body to objectively experience public space firsthand, but also to invite others to experience it on a small scale. Through my own thoughts, feelings, and spontaneity to take action and sense it with my body, to open up wounds and reveal them publicly.

This master's thesis and the research I conducted have helped me grow as an artist. My sensitivity to space and human reactions has increased significantly. Working with the body and in public spaces has allowed me to develop emotionally, having discovered new possibilities, my pursuit of growth is now more confident. In the future, I would like to continue the research presented in this master's thesis. The path I have chosen has developed my imagination and creativity, brought me closer to human beings, deepened my empathy, and stimulated my curiosity. Performance art played a key role in guiding me further along this path, driven by my desire to uncover information through a combination of logic and emotion. The final results, which came about through a fortunate coincidence **serendipity**, gave me immense satisfaction, as I had focused throughout on the methodology and the journey itself rather than the outcomes; as a result, these outcomes came as a genuine surprise to me. To my amazement, my initial focus on public space and the city's structures brought me closer to humans, their feelings, reactions and existence. This curiosity emerged over time. In my search for the unexpected, my curiosity has led me to some incredible discoveries.

This city already has an incredible story to tell; it is up to us to open our minds to see and hear it.

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Photography

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Figure 2 Research diagram (own illustration) 2026
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Figure 7 Performing the Shelter, 28.11.2024, Fontainhas, Photography: Heper Sayar
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Figure 35 Performance Imagine something what you never saw before, Photography: Camilla Formiconi 2026
Figure 36 Performance Imagine something what you never saw before, Photography: Camilla Formiconi 2026
Figure 37 Mapping through performances, Photography: Camilla Formiconi (own Illustration) 2026

8. Attachment

These photographs depict a series of practical sessions that form the basis of this Master's thesis; the sessions took place at universities in Porto, Portugal; Rotterdam, the Netherlands; and Le Havre, France (2025–2026). It is also an attempt to extend these practices to various areas of culture.

1. **Master Classes** Faculdade de Belas Artes da Universidade do Porto

Performance for ears, 3 December 2025, MADEP Studio

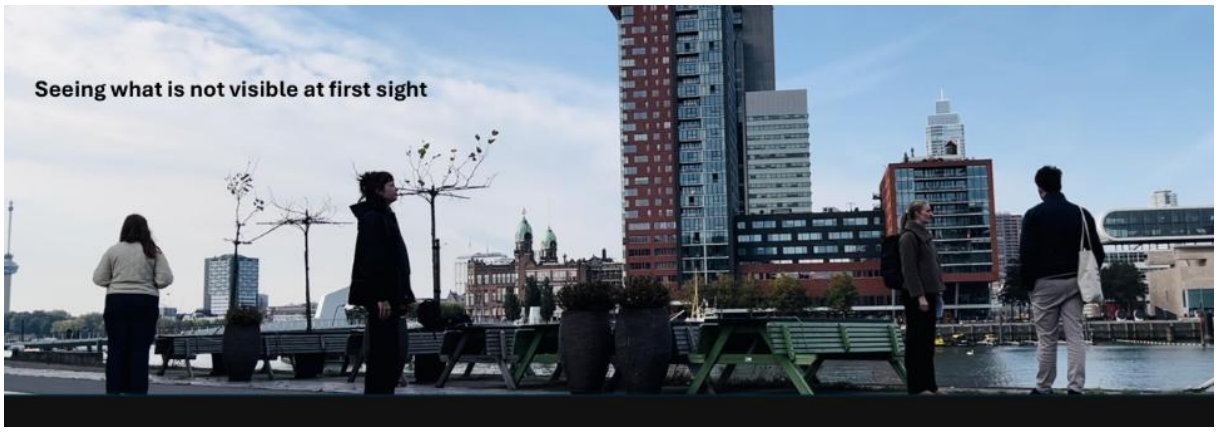


Attachment 1 Performance for ears, master classes FBAUP (own photogpraphy) 2025



Attachment 2 Performance for ears, master classes FBAUP (own photogpraphy) 2025

1. **Exercises of exploring the city** on Erasmus + BIP *Urban Transformation and Public Safety* in Inholland University of Applied Science Rotterdam, Netherlands October 2025



Attachment 3 Exercise EYE, 5 minutes (own photography) 2025



Attachment 4 Exercise EAR, 5 minutes (own photography) 2025



Attachment 5 Walking and describing, 5 minutes (own photography) 2025



Attachment 6 Presentation of Results and the Process of Adapting to the Space 2025, Rotterdam (own photography)



Attachment 7 Presentation of Results and the Process of Adapting to the Space 2025, Rotterdam (own photography)

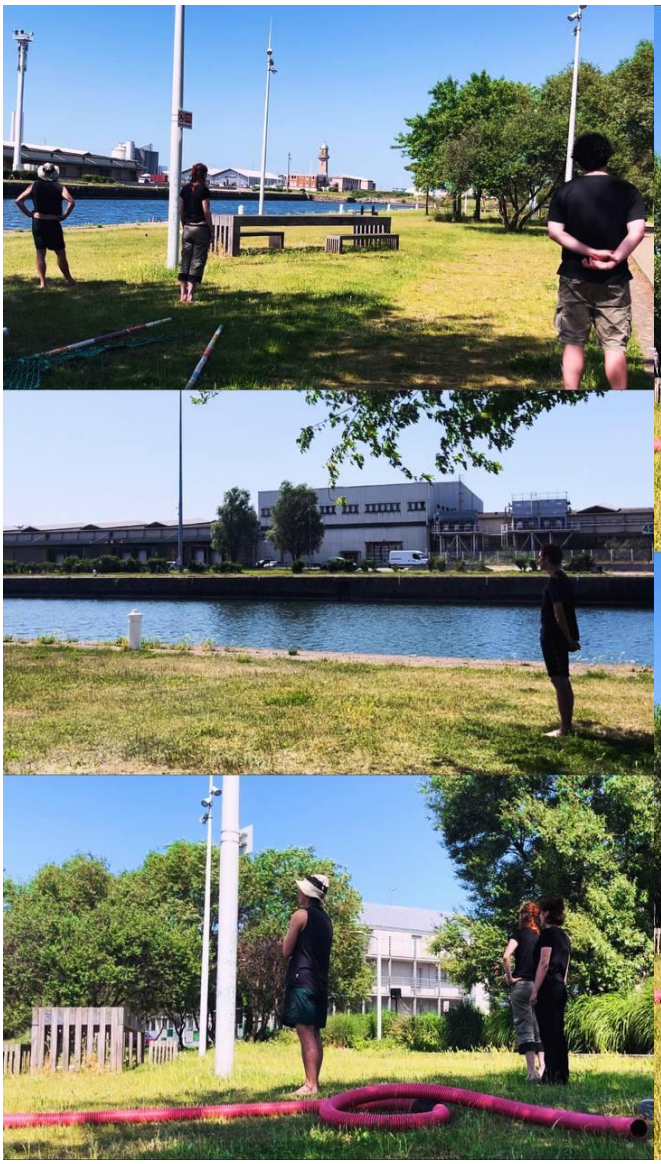
1. **Performative Workshop** – STEP - *Strategies for Transformative Education for art in Public spaces*, 25-30 May 2026 ‘The Resilient City’ University ésadhar Le Havre, France



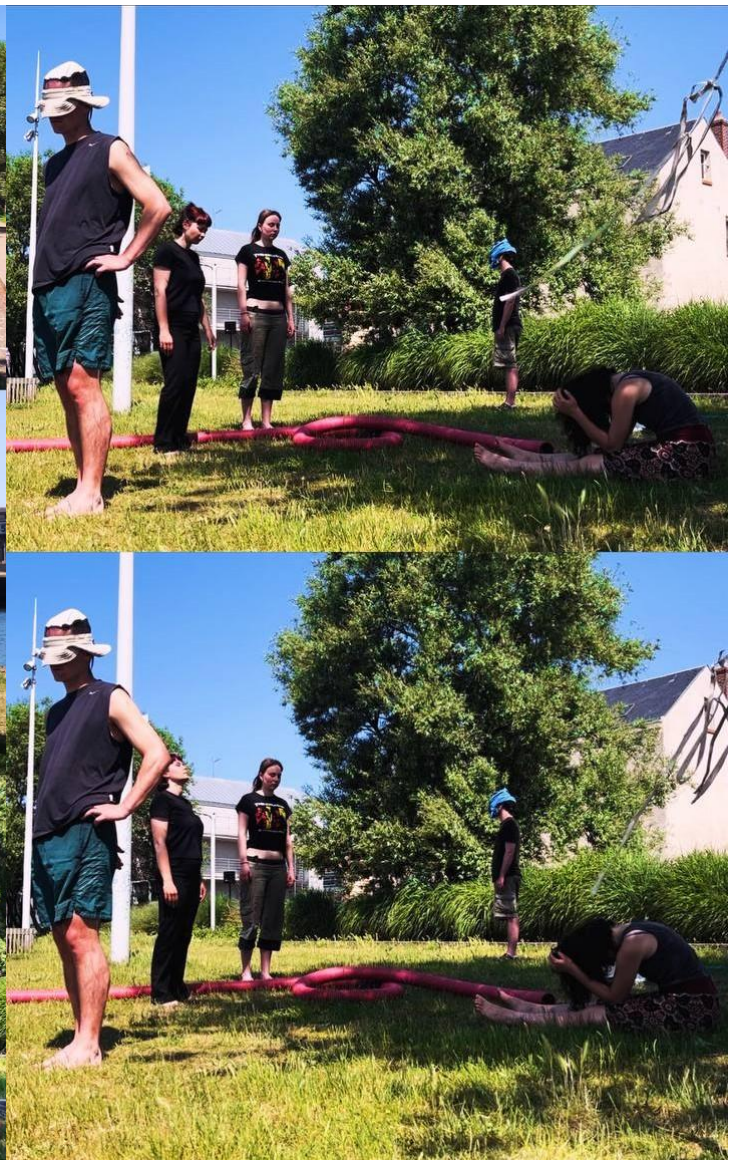
Attachment 6 Performative workshop, EAR exercise, 10 minutes (own photography) 2026

The resillient body - The exercises were created to strengthen the body, improve reflexes and encourage conscious adaptation to specific, induced situations, with the aim of developing adaptive abilities and awareness of one’s own reactions.

Participating in the *De/Re/Construct public space* group enabled me to use performative exercises to enliven the body and space, drawing on the power of the imagination to create, which helped to create a space conducive to integration, physical development and the creation of performative gestures.



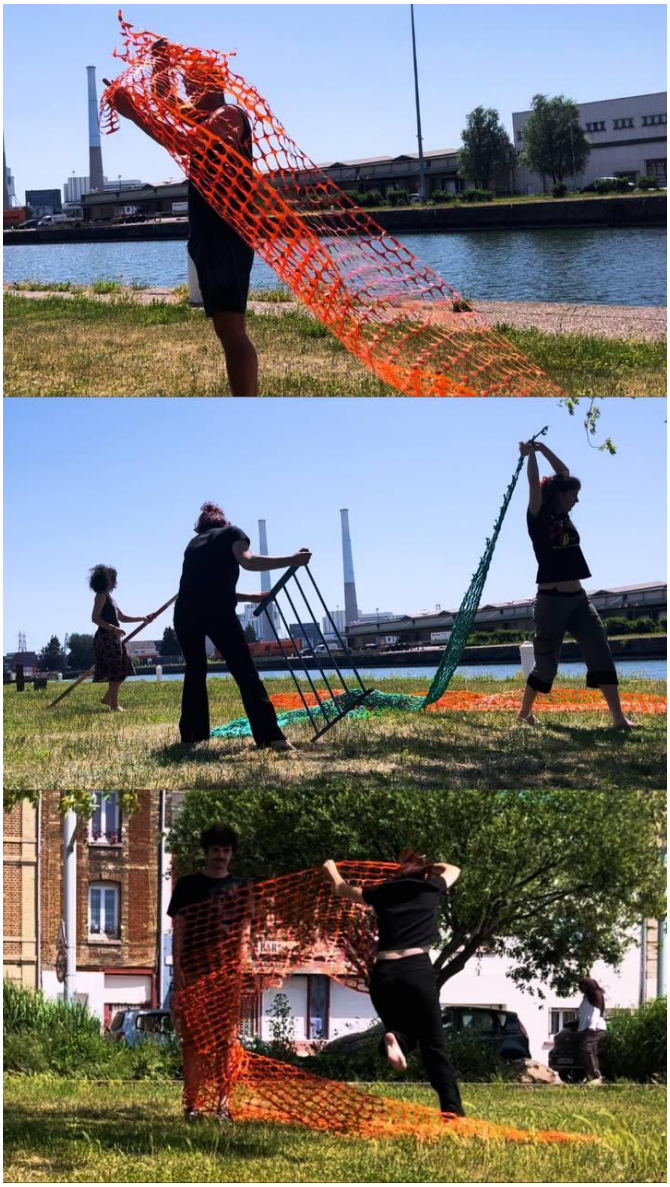
Attachment 9 Performative workshop, EYE exercise, 10 minutes (own photography) 2026



Attachment 8 Performative workshop, EYE exercise, 10 minutes (own photography) 2026



Attachment 10 Performative workshop (own photography) 2026



Attachment 11 Performative workshop, Walking and object exercise, 10 minutes (own photography) 2026



Attachment 13 Performative workshop, Walking and object exercise, 10 minutes (own photography) 2026



Attachment 12 Objects designed for a sensory trail to enhance experiences in public spaces (own photography) 2026

The Garden of Curiosity

Creating a space to explore one's imagination, senses, and the environment.

Objects created for the use of the body in public space; the structure not only activates the place but also the body, the senses, and social interactions in the city. Creating community and memories. Creating a structure as a space for human to discover their senses and imagination: '*Garden of Curiosity'*.

Performance *Yellow Expression*

at the opening exhibition *Fluid Narratives* on 14 July 2026 at the FBAUP Museum.

A performance taking the form of artistic expression using the colour yellow. This colour, usually used in spatial investigations to mark out space and create contrast, was intended to fulfil a different role in this context: colour as a means of communication, an instrument of speech, an extension of language.



Attachment 14 Performance 'Yellow Expression' Photography: Ana Sousa Santos 2026



Attachment 15 Performance 'Yellow Expression' Photography: Ana Sousa Santos 2026



Attachment 16 Performance 'Yellow Expression' Photography: Ana Sousa Santos 2026



In the composition, stand in front of a white wall as if it were a barrier, an obstacle forming a living part of the space. Identifying with colour yellow, the words 'Should art have limits?' were written on the wall in it. This was intended as a provocation to reflect on what we do, create and convey. Our emotions become the language we use in life and in our research. This is a question posed at the university to spark a discussion or at least to provide an impetus for reflection, on where the boundaries of art lie, and where the boundaries of art lie within the university.

Attachment 17 Performance 'Yellow Expression' Photography: Marina Abrão Moraes Corrêa 2026

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