

# Silence the Milena principle

## Shaping Silence

Growing Silence ✕ Silence as an instrument of experience.



An ongoing project to promote the qualities of silence and space in an urban context. Our project is about the experience and importance of urban silence and the connection between space and silence.

Not the physical definition of silence, or the acoustical definition counts. Through a phenomenological approach to silence the artists explore how sound unambiguously works on the human being (in this case in an urban context). Silence is an instrument of experience and as well as an instrument of knowledge.

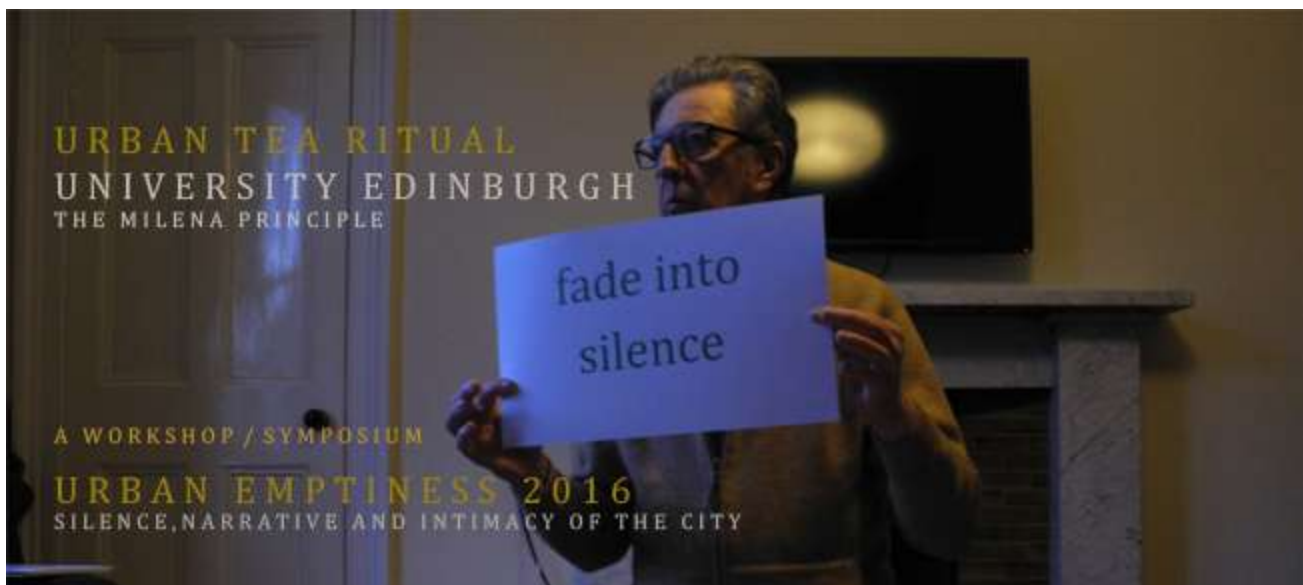
The project wants to realize a cultural bridge between the presence of silence as access to historical and natural soundscapes and the inner experience of silence. Silence is not limited to a material-acoustical aspect, silence is as well a part of city life as an inner space, a breathing space. This project tries to involve young people in the making of and creating of (urban) silence.

We invite students and young artists into the design process and try to engage them in the future development of their environment and to excite them about the city. Approaching silence will explore silence in the city, looking for design tools for the shaping of places and urban experiences.

## Silence with a smile.

Silence is a topic within the Milena principle since the beginning and has lead already in May–June 2011 to a co–organisation with the Athens School of Fine Arts and the Goethe Institut Athens for a project, promoting the qualities of silence and space in an urban context, out of the experience and importance of urban silence and the connection between space and silence.

Silence is an instrument of experience and as well as an instrument of knowledge, a presence in the consciousness, experienced with the senses and via the body. In this first project in Greece we were trying to involve young people in the making of and creating of (urban) silence, during the loud and intense political protests in Athens.



In Edinburgh, five years later, our exploration of silence returns broadened to intimacy, sharing, gestures towards others and the environment, walking together.

Most of the experts and artists, invited to Urban Emptiness, were not only related to the topic by their research or artistic interest, but collaborated before with each other and are friends, even living in various continents–countries and some meeting for the first time physically. All friends, next to presenting their work, participated creatively within the actions of the others, intersecting and exploring the intimacy of it.

The urban tea ritual ritualized the long friendship between Stefaan van Biesen and Geert Vermeire in slow, subtle and intimate gestures of dialogue and exchange, extending a time of togetherness to all the people present.

They expressed as well a pleasure, an enjoying with the senses and with the body. Silence with a smile.

the Milena principle and Silence.

Members of the Milena principle already are working for years with the theme of "silence". In 1993 visual artist Stefaan van Biesen realised a silence project in an urban context in his homeland: "Deafening, Silence" or 'Approaching silence' 2010.

the Milena principle is making a connection with silence artist: they are a source of inspiration. Like for example: Joseph Beuys, James Lee Byars, or the Spanish artist Tres Silencio.



the Milena principle and Escoitar.org [Spain 2006–2016] work together as a collective of sound artists, visual artists, anthropologists, musicologists and developers on projects focused on sound, auditive memory and the ethical concerns of cultural action.

They use open source technologies as a key concept for social activation.

They realize interactive sound maps, sound walks, sound installations, performances, connecting visual arts with sound art and other activities linked with the preservation of sound memory, the acknowledgment of intangible cultural heritage, the encouragement of listeners' involvement in the composition of the sound heritage.

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Projects about Silence:

# 2016

[Urban Emptiness] Fading Into Silence / Urban Tea Ritual ∞College of Arts Edinburgh.

Silence is a connection, a condition that compels or invites to listen. The “Unisono” performance starts as a wordless conversation of which both the performers are a part of a bonding silence. This creates a possibility for an instant conversation out of an awakening whispering, but a conversation is not necessary.

It is a ritual silence. Both protagonists represent “silence” through their muteness, their physical presence. If a conversation starts then it is as well a registration of their “inner landscape”, a field of silence.

The tea ritual wants to connect people through silence in a speechless being together and sharing.

The host is a medium of silence who hands on a wordless way “connection”, “care”, “attention for each other”, “hospitality for strangers”, “equality”, “social aesthetics”, “utopian ideas of democracy”, “the sensoriality of tasting and degustation”, relating through water and tea with nature (as a rediscovery of nature and becoming part of it), the ceremony as an ecological and symbolical ritual.



'Fading in to Silence | Urban Tea Ritual' with the performance 'Unisono' as a silent prologue by Geert Vermeire and Stefaan Van Biesen, artists / the Milena Principle, is one the common actions, which will take place on Wednesday 17th February 2016, at G.06, 50 George Square.

## Urban Emptiness

The project suggests an interdisciplinary investigation of emptiness and silence in three contemporary cities: Athens, Edinburgh and Brussels.

The aim is to highlight the importance of real and imaginary/hidden landscapes in the urban environment and explore different conditions of intimacy in their understanding.

Through three main actions that involve different methodological strategies (workshops, performative projects, open discussions and exhibitions), the project intends to contribute to the discourse about the social, educational, financial, ecological and cultural value of an experiential/performative understanding of silence and emptiness in urban life.

Acknowledging the significance of the contribution of diverse groups of people in its results, this pilot study invites university students and local citizens in its actions.

<http://urbanemptiness.org/>



Performances / walks by Geert Vermeire and Stefaan van Biesen during Urban Emptiness – Edinburgh College of Arts.

Our artistic contribution to Urban Emptiness in Edinburgh is about "presence", and an approach of being "passerby" via nomadic interactions with workshop leaders residents and places, interweaving ourselves (visible/invisible) in ongoing processes – events in space.

We realized some unannounced (silent) performances outdoors and indoors (never intrusive), some of them to happen completely unnoticed (but documented), bringing in our (very silent) methodology of "flow and gesture", in an invisible undercurrent and breeze passing by through the city.

Geert Vermeire wrote: Dear all, with greatest pleasure. Stefaan's and my presence is completely based the approach of being "passerby" via nomadic interactions with you, the

workshop participants and residents, interweaving ourselves (visible/invisible) in the ongoing processes during that week.

We have foreseen some unannounced (sound and silent) performances outdoors (always offered as a possibility, never intrusive) within the workshops and with collaboration of workshop participants, but some of them as well to happen completely unnoticed (but documented) , and where possible in dialogue with Marielys and with Akoo-o, bringing in our (very silent) methodology of "flow and gesture", in an invisible undercurrent and breeze passing by through the workshops and the city.

Our urban tea ritual is the center of this all and connected to the whole week, as a stand still experience / performative-participative event with you all & the workshop participants in an intimate in situ – (very) temporary exhibition with videos, soundscapes, prints, drawings, notes and texts related to our silent gestures to / conversations with the city and with you all, embracing the whole event, literally as a turning point (exactly in the middle of the week) towards an inner movement/ (re)connecting (with) you all. An eye in the storm of your many walks, the binding pause between the notes. So we're in!

Collaborators: Dr Michelle Bastian (Edinburgh) Stefaan van Biesen (Antwerp) Guy de Bievre (Brussels) Dr Sinan Bokesoy (Istanbul) Dr Nikos Bubaris (Mytilene) Dr Dimitris Charitos (Athens) Dr Anastasia Georgaki (Athens) Sofia Grigoriadou (Athens) Professor Panos Kouros (Patras) Marielys Melendez (Athens / Puerto Rico) Dana Papachristou (Athens / Paris) Professor Georgios Parmenidis (Athens) Dr. Patrick Primavesi (Leipzig) Dr Nikolas Remy (Volos) Giorgos Samantas (Athens) Dr Ana Sanchez-Colberg (Athens) Katerina Taliani (Edinburgh) Elli Vassalou (Brussels) Dr Simona Vermeire (Brussels) Dr Alexander Voutsas (Athens) Thanos Vovolis (Athens) .

Silence in the urban space. A performance based on a tea ritual.

Conversations, soundscapes, smell, gestures are part of an alternating talk and performance focusing on the relation between water, writing and the city during an ad hoc temporary exhibition as a flow of drawings, prints, sounds and videos.

We redefine the tea ritual as a literary and artistical meeting place inspired by Venice and the (wordless) conversations between Marco Polo and Kublai Khan in the novel *Invisible Cities* of Calvino. Moments of keeping silence interchange with conversations, intertwined with ideas about society and liquid cities, and the sharing about the taste of tea and other facets of tasting and sensorial experience. The body and senses becomes an instrument of knowledge and of communication between people and cities.

A video talk by Geert Vermeire and Stefaan van Biesen about the Silence project 'Urban Emptiness' Edinburgh 2016.

[Diogenes Variations] ( Acquiring Ignorance ) Silent Performance ∞Edinburgh Scotland.



The Diogenes Variations: [ Acquiring ignorance / A feeling touching ].

As artists within the Urban Emptiness' launch week at the Edinburgh University we are observers, nomads in a noman's land of being and thinking. In the very first actions of the Milena principle in 2003 we departed already from a feeling thinking, a field between the feel and the vision, a decade later we (re)find the same territory, with a feeling touching in our movement through the (urban) space.

Moving as well between Athens, Brussels and Edinburgh is reconnecting us with antiquity, renaissance and modernity. We become the Diogenes of our time, wanderers in the city with a lantern in broad daylight, looking for a human being, embracing ignorance.

Diogenes saw himself as a cosmopolitan, a citizen of the world, not belonging to one place, open for encounters on the road and during his errands in the city of Athens. With walking and our bodies as tools we invite ourselves and the people around us "to get lost in the right direction", in a gesture of not knowing, opening our hands towards the environment around us, a silent listening.

As nomads between cities as Athens, Brussels and Edinburgh we actualize, once more, travelling as a way of being, as a field of sharing. The Dürer connection; more than travelling continuously through Europe to work on location, renaissance artists and scholars travelled to meet their friends, leaving a trace of letters and ideas sprouting out of these personal encounters. It is this utopian field of sharing that thrives us through Europe, creating on and with the location and the people on our visible and invisible paths.

Our travels are silent, our actions barely noticed, but they appear in a gesture of embracing what we find and let go, walking together with friends and strangers in a feeling touching, we are becoming the cities we pass by.

## Unisono performance Sulpture Court ECA Main Building Edinburgh Scotland 2016.



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# 2015

## [Sea Born performance] ✕ Giudecca Venice 2015.

Silent Performance with Geert Vermeire and Stefaan van Biesen. Camera by Annemie Mestdagh.

On the occasion of 30 years since the death of Italian writer Italo Calvino (1923 – 1985), the department of Communication and Media of the University of Athens and the Italian Cultural Institute of Athens organize an interdisciplinary artistic and academic event called "Invisible Cities".

"The Invisible Cities", the most famous novel of the Italian writer, was first published in 1972 and takes us to fictive towns, where wishes, exchanges, memory, signs and things emerge as building stones of an urban society, reflecting about the contemporary urban culture.

The event brings together scientists, academics and artists in a personal and material dialogue about imagination and contemporary urban society.

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## [Unfolding the City] Campo San Pantalon ✕ Venice Italy 2015.

During the 'Sea Born' project of the Milena principle [Venice 2015], Geert Vermeire made a writing performance on Campo San Pantalon. Camera & video by Stefaan van Biesen.

Third video in the ongoing series of performances, video's and soundscapes for "Invisible Cities" in Athens (Italian Cultural Institute Athens / Athens University) and "Utopia" (Cities and Memories project, Oxford). Video "Unfolding the city" by the Milena principle, Geert Vermeire & Stefaan van Biesen, Venice September 2015.

Geert Vermeire and Stefaan van Biesen made field recordings in Venice and later in Antwerp. They used this digital material to make a soundscape 'Hythlodæus 2015' for the Utopia sound project of Cities and Memory.

The theme was the map of Utopia made by Ambrosius Holbein in 1518. A part of this soundscape is included in the video.

Invisible Cities / Αόρατες Πόλεις, coordinated by Maria Saridaki and Maria Vasileiou, organized by Istituto Italiano di Cultura di Atene and University of Athens, Department of Communication and Media Studies.

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[On The Surface] silent writing Campo San Pantalon ✕ Venice 2015.

'On The Surface' the Milena principle. A silent performance by Geert Vermeire, writing a poem on the surface of the water of Venice. Location Campo San Pantalon, in the centre of the old city. This performance was shown during the 'Invisible Cities' project in Athens Greece later that year. Camera by Stefaan van Biesen.

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[Reading the moment] [Walking Observing Sensing Being] Athens Greece 2015.



*'There is so much to discover in every step. The ordinary becomes extraordinary. Attention shifts to Awareness. Let's walk together and wonder around... We are the space we inhabit. Have we looked at it carefully? We move and so does our relationship with our world. Let's (re)encounter our place. We become the place'*

Reading the moment is a collective walking experience through the street of Athens. No other intention, no other expectation than experiencing place/space allowing our bodies to archive our version of the city. Emerging from a spontaneous convergence of people, practices and ideas this initial exploration of Reading the moment is a collaboration among Geert Vermeire, Stefaan Van Biesen, and Marielys Burgos Meléndez.

A workshop in the frame of Episodes of Urban Emptiness: Real and Imaginary Explorations of Silence in the Contemporary City. Edinburgh, Brussels, Athens.

Geert Vermeire is a Belgian curator, artist and writer, working between Athens, Lisbon and Brussels, referring to the concept of 'the body as measure unit' using the senses and the body as instruments of knowledge, experience and creativity, departing from social practices, community involvement and the ethical involvement of cultural action.

Stefaan Van Biesen is a Belgian visual artist, multimedia artist, sound artist and writer. His oeuvre is focused on the research of walking as an instrument of knowledge and of artistic creation.

Marielys Burgos Meléndez is an independent artist/researcher from San Juan, Puerto Rico. Her creative practice encompasses dance, performance art, movement and video installation, video art and creative writing. Through her current research, ISLA en FUGA, Marielys is dislocating herself, deepening in the experiences of mobility and survival strategies.



# 2011

[Urban Oracle] ASFA Academy Of Fine Arts Athens Greece [Silence project] 2011.



'Urban Oracle' the Milena principle – Athens Greece 2011.

Vaitsa Papazikou, Dimitra Siliali, Stefaan Van Biesen and Geert Vermeire speaking words in a tender gesture to the city of Athens.

Visions and wishes appearing in the minds of four artists, connected in an utopian and human field of listening and silence.

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[Rain Songs] ASFA Academy Of Fine Arts Silence Project Athens Greece 2011.



Rainsongs' the Milena principle – Athens Greece 2011. Listening and silence performance with Vaitsa Papazikou and Dimitra Siliali at the Acropolis in Athens.

A curtain of rain around the young artists as a delicate sound in a city which came to a stand still after a thunder storm.

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[Growing Silence] Silence Project at Goethe Institute Athens Greece 2011.



A project to promote the qualities of silence and space in an urban context. Our project is about the experience and importance of urban silence and the connection between space and silence. In the Goethe-Institut Athens the Belgian artists Stefaan van Biesen and Geert Vermeire were showing videos of performances and art projects in Germany [the Naumburg Variations and Grunewald Variations], next to an installation/performance made in Athens, documenting urban artistic interventions.

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[Liquid Islands] An urban silent ritual ∞ Venice Italy 2011.



the Milena principle proposed a silent intervention, 'Liquid Islands' [washing the feet of strangers], in the old Renaissance city surrounded by sea.

Myriam Bosschem [Belgium], accepted and asked several people, who passed by, if she could wash their feet as an urban gesture of caring and making connection. Starting in the early morning at Campo San Margherita, asking people to participate, finally she found a traveling couple from Norway who accepted the offer: Jette KJ Øigard and her husband Bjarne Bjerkeland.

The final location, where this unannounced event took place, was Campo San Zaccaria near San Marco, an old square where many people pass by. This urban ritual took place in the evening near an old waterfountain. People stopped and wondered.

The Milena principle participated with Annemie Mestdagh, Ingrid Smeekens, Myriam Bosschem, Peter Maes [the colour U], Filip Van de Velde and Stefaan van Biesen. Camera Peter Maes, Annemie Mestdagh and Stefaan van Biesen.

# 2010

[Approaching Silence] Escoitar.org & the Milena principle Porto 2010.



[How long is now?] Braga ⇌ Porto Portugal.



During July 2010 the Milena principle stayed in Braga in Portugal in the Nogueira da Silva Museum. Installations were shown in the Biscainhos museum and also in da Silva.

Stefaan van Biesen and Geert Vermeire did a silence performance.

Lectures were held in the Serralves Foundation in Porto, Show me gallery in Braga. A presentation of our new projects in MARCO, the museum of contemporary art in Vigo Spain. Meeting Stephanie Brandt of Spacepilots London UK and the soundartists of Escoitar.org Spain.

Another silence performance by Julie Snauwaert/Stefaan van Biesen 'Sleeper' took place at the Nogueira Da Silva Museum in Braga.

# 2006

[Grunewald Variations] Silence Performance at Grunewald [Berlin Germany 2006].



[We carry our paths (I)] The Grunewald variations ∞ Silence Performance.

Videostills from the performance 'Die Grunewald Variationen'.

A seemingly endless thread made visible the path of a walker in the Grunewald forest in the vicinity of Berlin.

It was a silent tribute to the deportees who left for an unknown and terrible place. A greeting, a gesture of commitment.



[Econcerto] Silence Performance [Natuurpunt] Willebroek Belgium 2006].



A 3 hour silent public performance by Geert Vermeire and Stefaan van Biesen during Econcerto 2006.

This performance was by invitation of Natuurpunt, a Belgium ecological organisation that takes care for forres and landscape.

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# 2005

[Naumburg Variations] Silence Performance Dom of Naumburg Germany 2005.



'the Naumburg Variations' [Naumburg Germany September 2005].

Silence performance by Geert Vermeire and Stefaan van Biesen held in the cathedral of Naumburg in Germany, along with participants of the Nietzsche Seminar.

This part of the Friedrich Nietzsche Seminar [on the domain Wielandgut Osmansted Weimar 2005] with Professor Dr. Friedrich Voßkühler University of Darmstadt and Dr.. Frithjof Reinhardt, Weimar, at the invitation of Ingrid Pee [philosophical group Kassel].

Theme:'Auf den Spuren Friedrich Nietzsches von Röcken bis Weimar'. Eine Veranstaltung der Weimar–Jena Akademie in Zusammenarbeit mit Invitare vom 06.–09.10.05. “ Nietzsche als der Gekreuzigte.

Leben und Werk als Überwindungsversuch des protestantischen Pfarrhauses“.

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[Mirror Man] Silence Performance [Calle dei Amici] Venice Italy 2005.

During the visit to the Biennale of Venice 2005, the Milena stayed in Casa Querini, an old renaissance building near the San Marco basilica.

During this visit, several silence performances which had been planned in advance took place and were partly photographed and filmed.

There was also an evening lecture on 'the bridge of encounters'. A nocturnal walk brought everybody together in the 'Calle dei Amici', a place which the Venetians call a magic place, a symbol of timeless friendship.

Geert Vermeire brought a number of silent writing performances such as 'Bridge writer' on the Magdalena bridge, 'Writing in water' in the rising water of the Campo San Giorgio D. Greci and the northern Venetian channels of Cannaregio.

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# 2004

[Sleeper I] About Melancholy Drogenen Belgium 2004.

