

# Urban Emptiness the Milena principle

## Urban Emptiness Network



### About the Urban Emptiness Network:

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/>

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# 2017

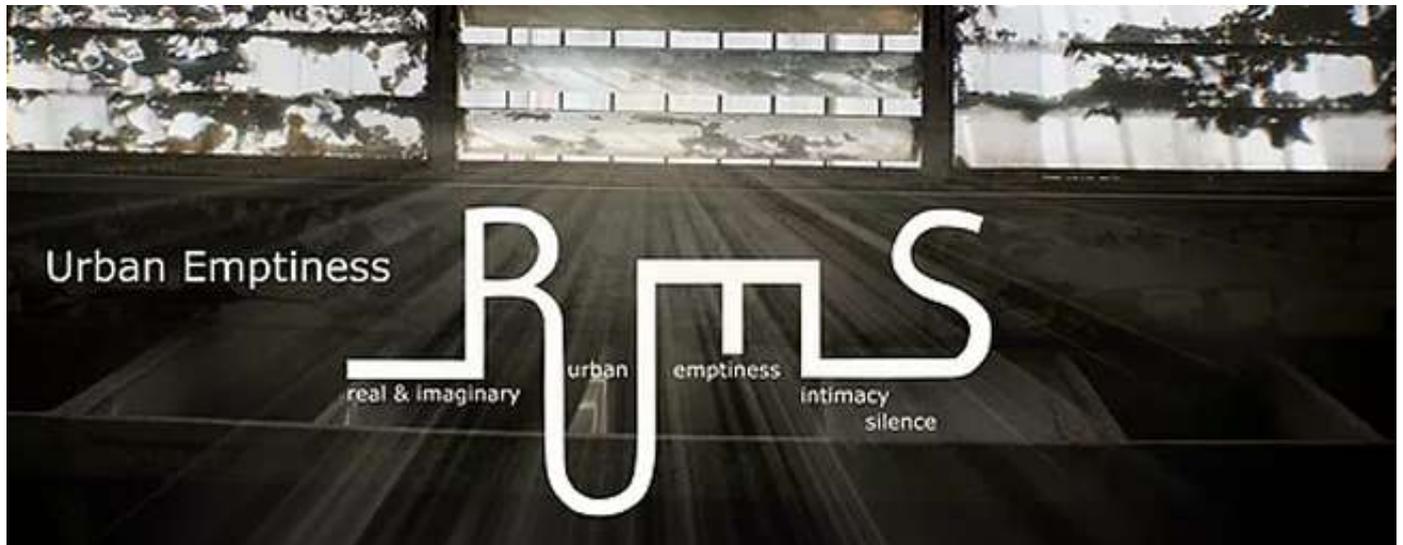
[Urban Emptiness Network] Académie Royale de Beaux Arts Brussels Belgium  
21.12.2017.



Presentation of the Urban Emptiness Network in the gallery of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels. Together with the works of international artists of New York and Brussels.

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[Urban Emptiness Nicosia Festival] Nicosia Cyprus 01.12 >10.12.2017.  
Dance, movement / performance art, visual art, sound art, media art and architecture.  
Walks, workshops, talks, exhibition – indoors/outdoors installations.



More info Urban Emptiness Nicosia 2017:

<https://www.cscalab.com/single-post/2017/11/16/URBAN-EMPTINESS-NICOSIA-FESTIVAL>

Urban Emptiness Nicosia is an artistic laboratory during two weeks in the city fabric of Nicosia, with artists from the US, Puerto Rico, Japan, Mexico, Australia, Belgium, UK, Holland, Catalonia, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Greece and Cyprus.

The Festival, between 1–10 December 2017, explores the interconnection among walking and new media in digital and physical space with interdisciplinary performances, dance – movement – walking workshops and a complementary exhibition (till 16 December) of video and sound pieces, mapping and walking related indoor/outdoor installations, documented walks, simultaneously happening in Nicosia and other cities, and of work in progress by students in New York, Brussels and Athens.

Special attention goes to the exploration of the city of Nicosia, its people's everyday actions and to negotiations of city spaces revealing their potentiality and hidden qualities. The Festival takes place in various locations in the city most notably the Dancehouse Lefkosia, Old Market (Municipal Market), Point Centre for Contemporary Art.

The URBAN EMPTINESS NICOSIA FESTIVAL is sponsored by the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture, the Flemish Ministry of Culture, the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Brussels and European Cultural Foundation.

The Festival concurs and is supported by the No\_Body Festival, organized by Dance Gate Lefkosia, is facilitated by Point Centre for Contemporary Arts and is part of the Pop-up Festival Nicosia.

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[Leafless (I & II)] Performance / attribute Dancehouse Lefkosia Nicosia Cyprus 2017. Urban Emptiness Network.



[Leafless (II)] Maya Dalinsky [USA/B] at Dancehouse Lefkosia. Urban Emptiness Nicosia Festival 2017.

Leafless (I & II) Stefaan van Biesen / May Dalinsky / Anastasia McCammon at exhibition opening. Attribute made by Annemie Mestdagh.

Culture versus nature. In the desire for connection with nature, it seems that we place the idea of 'nature' outside us. Something we are alienated from.

Often the idea 'nature' is only a projection of our own ideas, so that we reconcile ourselves with our own delusions.

In an urban context Stefaan van Biesen puts question marks by this desire because we often do not fully realize that we are indeed nature ourselves.

Something that we lost on our path. The hybrid thinking man, half plant, half ratio, who doubts between two polar worlds and who cannot give himself a place in it.



[Leafless (I)] Anastasia McCammon at Dancehouse Lefkosia. Urban Emptiness Nicosia Festival 2017.

'Leafless (I & II)' are nomadic attributes for a performance, a silent thinking instrument with which one can attempt to express this cultural ambiguity.

Stefaan van Biesen asks us to join this work. Perhaps to reflect on what is culture and nature? Or rather: refine this question by the language of art because an answer remains impossible or unspeakable.

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[Meander] Urban Emptiness Nicosia Festival. Performance with walking participants 07.12.2017.



Walking is an instrument for knowledge and experience in the work of Stefaan van Biesen. Concepts such as silence / time / body / mind, influenced by Oriental approaches, are situating themselves within a Western way of thinking. Just like Joseph Beuys the artist wants to connect Asian intuition and spirituality with European realism and rationality, in the way

that Beuys no longer regarded the 'Eurasian man' being focused on itself but on humanity and culture.

Stefaan van Biesen invites you to for a silent walk / performance: 'Meander', where concepts such as 'connecting / letting go / leading / trust / taking care of ' are the underlying ideas. In this constellation of influences, (of feeling and being involved), you become, as the co-walker, the work of art!

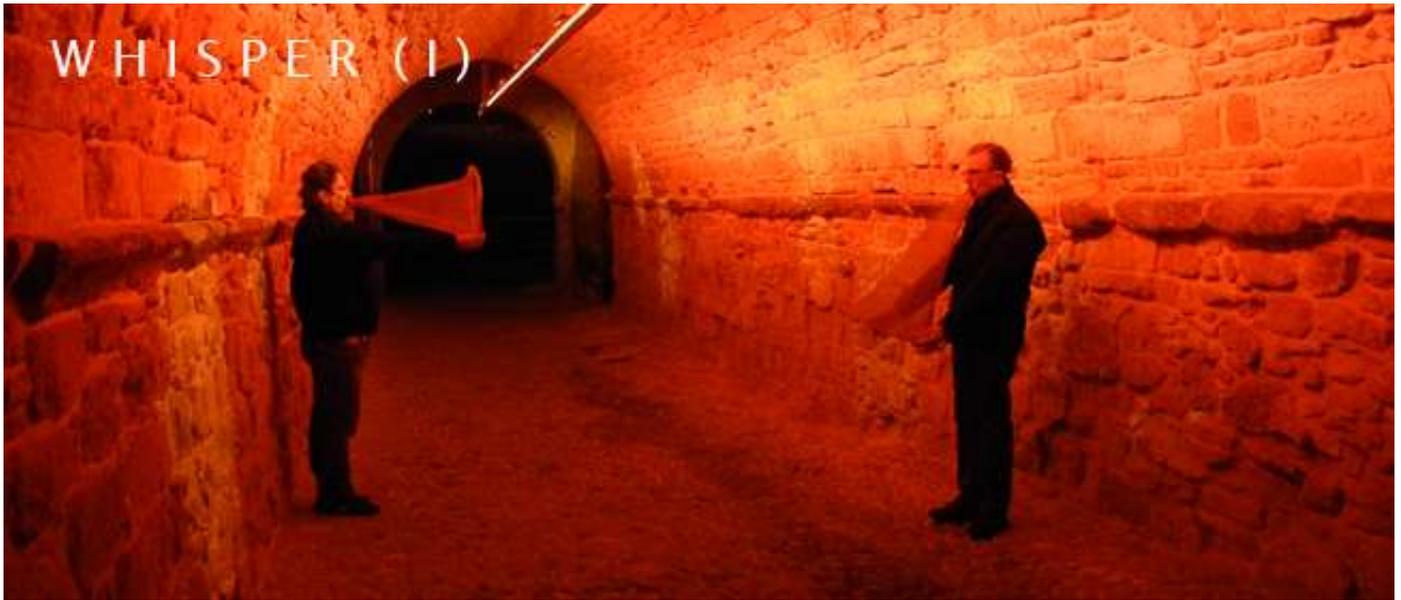
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Whiff [Whispering (I)] Urban Emptiness Nicosia Festival. Performance with walking participants 06.12.2017.



Thursday 7th of December 2017 11:00- 12:00 / Stefaan van Biesen.

Whispering Performance at Municipal Market Nicosia (Performance / Workshop - oriental movement practices).



Whiff [Whispering] Paphos Gate Nicosia [Green Line] Urban Emptiness Nicosia Festival 2017 with Geert Vermeire. Camera & attribute: Annemie Mestdagh. Video, concept & soundscore: Stefaan van Biesen.

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Whiff [Whispering (II)] Urban Emptiness Nicosia Festival. Performance with walking participants 07.12.2017.



Whiff [Whispering] [Green Line] performance Urban Emptiness Nicosia Festival 2017.

A silent man who whispers the world. A gesture of tenderness, involvement, connection and also a discourse made visible.

An image of a caring hand, a standing man, a projection of desire, words that are whispered in the hope that they will expand in time and space.

Also the question to be a listening ear. It may seem like a noble but absurd and senseless act, something that won't lead to no results. But nothing is less true: the whisperer, the silent standing man becomes an image of a silent inner knowing.

A question how our actions determine and shape our environment and socio-cultural biotope? What is the effect and what are the consequences of our 'Being'?

Whispering like a force, a deeply human gesture. Silence as a loud demand for togetherness, caring, as an ecological, socially humane instrument.

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[Urban Emptiness Network] Brussels Belgium December 18.12 > 21.12.2017.



Our team for the intensive week / exhibition in Brussels:

Participating artists/researchers will be:

Adonis Volanakis (visual artist, performance artist / Athens Conservatoire Drama School / Tisch School of the Arts NYU) (Athens / New York).

Lydia Matthews (on distance) (Parsons New School) (New York).

Marielys Burgos Meléndez (interdisciplinary artist, dancer) (Puerto Rico / New York).

Stella Mygdali (Edinburgh College of Arts) (Edinburgh UK).

Christos Kakalis (Architecture School – University of Newcastle) (Newcastle, UK.)

Maya Dalinsky (artist, dancer) (Brussels).

Elli Vassalou (architect, visual artist / performance artist) (Brussels/Athens).

Stefaan van Biesen (visual artist, sound artist, walking artist) (Melsele, Belgium).

Enzo Pezzella (artistic director Royal Academy of Fine Arts / Higher Institute of Arts and Choreography) (Brussels).

Alice Finichiu (coordinator Urban Emptiness – Walking as a Research module Royal Academy of Fine Arts) (Brussels) Lydia Bollen (coordinator Urban Emptiness – Walking as a Research module Royal Academy of Fine Arts / Dept of Architecture – University of Mons) (Brussels / Mons). Geert Vermeire (coordinator Urban Emptiness – Walking as a Research module Royal Academy of Fine Arts / curator).

A public talk / round table with all of us in Brussels is planned for 21st evening. For the exhibition we have the art gallery of the Academy

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[Meander] performance Stefaan van Biesen at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Brussels 16.11.2017 in the frame of Urban Emptiness Network with the students/artists.

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[Slow walking / silent walking] exercises with students of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels.



An exciting start of the Walking Lab Brussels as part of the Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels. Initiated by Vermeire Geert in collaboration with Lydia Bollen (ARBA – Architecture School

University of Mons), Alice Finichiu (ARBA – Urban Design / ULB University of Brussels) and Enzo Pezzella (artistic director ISAC – Higher Institute of Arts and Choreography) together with the Urban Emptiness Network.

Invited artists/researchers Stefaan van Biesen, Adonis Volanakis, Lydia Matthews, Marielys Lely Burgos, Stella Mygdali, Christos Kakalis.

From October till end of December: seminars, walks, talks, workshops, simultaneous with other Walking Labs in New York and Athens (Parsons – Fine Arts and Odeon – Conservatoire Athens), a creation lab and joint exhibition with CSCA Lab / European University Nicosia and Dance House Nicosia, Cyprus, with Sophie Gee and Arianna Economou.

<http://portail.arba-esa.be/.../urban-emptiness-la-marche-com.../>

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Utopia [just around the corner?]. A silent drift for three walkers or more.



This walk, some days ago in Manhattan, as a tender and slow gesture towards the city, suddenly moves into another perspective after the terrorist attack some hours ago in the same place that was walked. Sharing the images as a balm for a city where today pedestrians and bikers were savagely attacked.

With Freddie Dessau, Jose Ernesto Rivera Perez and John Gorgone, inhabitants of New York and students of the Studio Walking as a Practice at Parsons New York (lead by Lydia Matthews).

A parallel / simultaneous action with Utopia Walk Brussels, with students of the Walking as a Research Lab at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts with Stefaan van Biesen, Annemie Mestdagh, Lydia Bollen and Alice Fddbff, as part of the Urban Emptiness Network.

A silent group walk, moving in a flow through NY City, departing from Gracie Mansion, with no other intention than to get lost, with a book, inspired by Thomas More's, but containing only one word, "Utopia".

It is a book that resembles a walk, it is not linear, it opens from different angles, it has pages folded in pages, you can open and browse it in different directions, not a book to be read, but a book to be shared spontaneously between the participating walkers, to be carried around in silence and to be opened on places that come towards them, as an inviting to open and read the place, the walkers and the moment in which they stand.



A silent walking performance by the Milena principle (Belgium) with Geert Vermeire (performance artist), conceived on the Utopia book by Stefaan van Biesen (visual artist), and together forming an artistic walking duo since 2001 developing in a collaborative practice.

As a duo of walkers they invite guests artists and the public to perform with them in a continuous series of walking performances in contemporary cities around the world.

Photographs: Freddie Dessau, Jose Ernesto Rivera Perez, Geert Vermeire, John Gorgone.

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[The Sergiu Celibidache Variations] Performance/video Venice >09.10.2017.

A silent conducting performance by Geert Vermeire / the Milena principle Venice 2017. A tribute to Sergiu Celibidache [1912–1996]. Video, concept & camera: Stefaan van Biesen/Annemie Mestdagh. Urban Emptiness Network. [www.themilena.com/](http://www.themilena.com/)

*Conducting a landscape...*

*The musical material is, in a sense, like a landscape, it has mountains, valleys, rivers. It has its own topography. What can we do to become aware of this landscape and its different natural variances? We cannot change them, we cannot alter them [...] we must integrate all the information about the landscape into a single unity.*

*Musically speaking, one cannot change the music to make it more expressive. [...] But the path of these criteria through the landscape, no matter how incompletely it is represented in the score, is a representation of the landscape. If we follow the composer's guidelines, what is to be interpreted? [...]*

*Behind the term "interpretation" there surely lies the idea that one can treat music as it was a simple object, as something that can be taken out from the refrigerator, and topped with a certain sauce, depending on someone's taste.*

*There is nothing more false and more distant from what music really means.*

*Sergiu Celibidache.*

Text by Geert Vermeire/student of Celibidache.

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[Urban Emptiness Network] Edinburg, Limassol, New York, Brussels, Athens & Nicosia, October/November 2017.



The Urban Emptiness Network suggests an interdisciplinary investigation of emptiness and

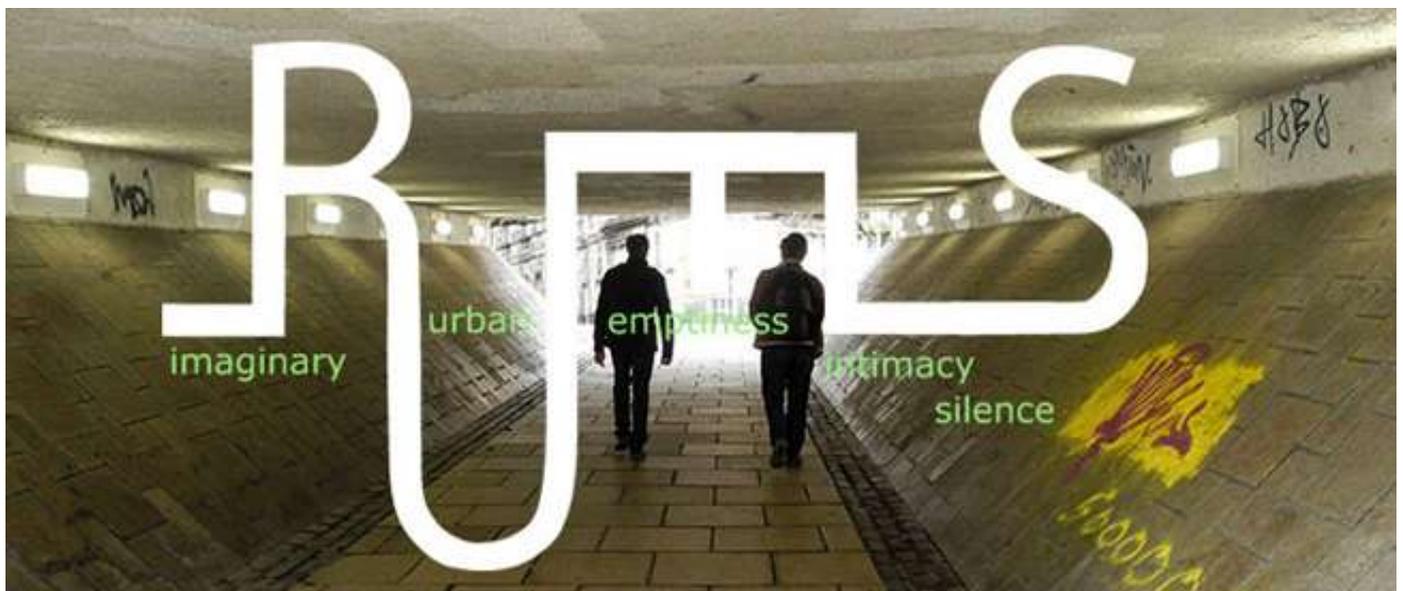
silence in contemporary cities, now extended to Brussels, New York, Athens and Nicosia/Limassol, after a pilot project involving Edinburgh, Athens and Brussels with related exhibitions and actions in Brussels (QO-2 / RITCS School of Arts), Athens (Benaki Museum – EMST National Museum of Contemporary Arts Athens / School of Architecture – NTUA National Technological University Athens) and Edinburgh (Edinburgh College of Arts) and in Limassol (NeMe Arts Center / CUT Cyprus University of Technology) in 2016 and collaborations in Lesbos (Aegean University) and New York (Studio Walking as Practice / Parsons New School NY).

The aim of this network between cities, institutions and artists/researchers is to highlight the importance of real and imaginary/hidden landscapes in the urban environment and explore different conditions of intimacy in their understanding.

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[Urban Emptiness Network] NeMe Arts Centre Limassol Cyprus February 2017.



Urban Emptiness is an exhibition about emptiness and silence in Limassol and about related walking actions in various cities such as Athens, Edinburgh, Brussels and New York which all form part of the international network Urban Emptiness. Walking is the key element in the creative processes and outcomes of this network and of the actions in Limassol.

The exhibited works were created within walking exchange projects between students of

Cyprus University of Technology Limassol, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies (led by Dr Angeliki Gazi & Dr Yiannis Christidis), the University of the Aegean, Department of Cultural Technology and Communication (led by Dr Nikos Bubaris), the Parsons New School of Design, New York (led by Dr Lydia Matthews), Drama School of the Athens Conservatoire (led by Adonis Volanakis), RITCS School of Arts – Radio Dept Brussels (led by Dr Guy Debievre), National Technical University of Athens – School of Architecture (led by Dr Georgios Parmenidis, Dr Nelly Marda and Olga Ioannou), Edinburgh College of Arts – ESALA (led by Dr Christos Kakalis, Stella Mygdali) and Marielys Lely Burgos – Marielys Burgos Melendez, Stefaan van Biesen, Vermeire Geert, Ismini Gatou, Andromachi Vrakatseli B

The exhibition includes as well walking performances and media walks that have been created by the Cyprus based artists: Elena Pillakouri, Evdokia Georgiou, Maria O Rouse – Maria Andreou and the Mind the Gap collective and by Geert Vermeire. Organized by NeMe and by Urban Emptiness Network.



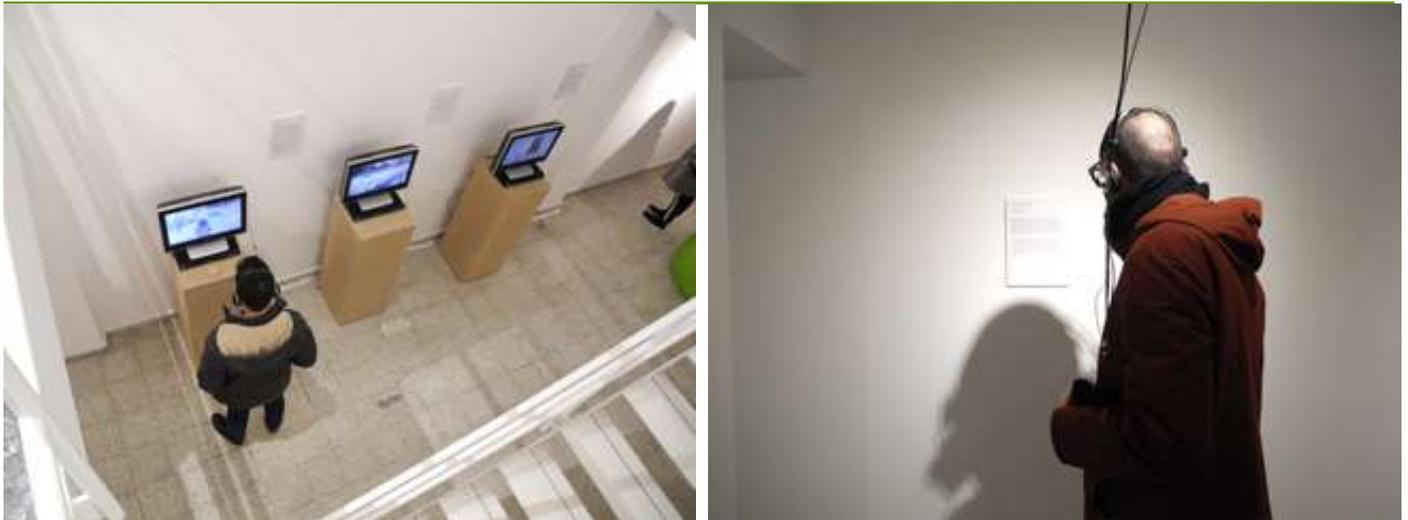
Installation Urban Emptiness Network by Stefaan van Biesen and Annemie Mestdagh.

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Exhibition Opening: 04/02/2017, 20:30 pm

Venue: NeMe Arts Centre

Duration: 04/02/2017 – 04/03/2017

Opening Days/Times: Tuesday–Friday: 17:30pm–20:30pm, Saturday: 10:00–13:00

See link NeMe Arts Centre Limassol :

<http://www.neme.org/eventsurban-emptiness/>

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[Urban Emptiness Network] lecture University of Technology Limassol Cyprus February 2017.



Seminar speakers: Dr. Nikos Bubaris (Aegean University), Haris Pellapaisiotis (University of Nicosia), Dr. Yiannis Christidis (Cyprus University of Technology), Stefaan van Biesen (sound artist/ walking artist, Belgium), Marielys Burgos Melendez (dance artist/researcher, Puerto Rico) Via Skype: Dr. Christos Kakalis (Urban Emptiness Network organizer, University of Newcastle) and Stella Mygdali (Urban Emptiness Network organizer, University of Edinburgh).

Seminar: 04/02/2017, 17:00–20:00

Seminar language: English

Venue: Pefkios Georgiades Auditorium, Cyprus University of Technology, Limassol



# 2016

[Urban Emptiness] Exhibition Sculpture Court of the ECA Main Building 20>24.06.2016.

Silence, Narrative and the Intimacy of the city / Exhibition of actions and workshop results of the Urban Emptiness International Network, an interdisciplinary investigation of emptiness and silence in three contemporary cities: Athens, Edinburgh and Brussels.

In the frame of the symposium "The Place of Silence: Experience, Environment and Affect" / University of Edinburgh.

Sculpture Court, Edinburgh College of Art. Chirstos Kakalis & Stella Mygdali.



An exhibition/presentation at Sculpture Court [College of Arts University Edinburgh] about the project in Februari 2016: Silence, Narrative and the Intimicy of the City. A Workshop Symposium.



The neo-classical Sculpture Court of the ECA Main Building is home to the many pieces from the Edinburgh Cast Collection, and provides a spectacular environment for student exhibitions. It also hosts work by major international artists, and is a popular venue during Edinburgh's festival season.

[Sketchbook Urban Emptiness] Stefaan van Biesen & Geert Vermeire Edinburgh Scotland 2016.

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Urban Emptiness [Edinburgh–Athens–Brussels] Q-02 Brussels Belgium 2016.



Slow and silent walk. Urban Emptiness Brussels. Presentation at Q-02 Brussels, a space for artistic research, reflection, and creation in the field of experimental music and sound art.

Q-02 is a structurally subsidized workspace for experimental contemporary music and sound art since 2006 and has its own space in the Brussels canal zone. The workspace developed out of the contemporary music ensemble Q-02. In practice, Q-02 operates at three levels: it offers working residencies to artists; carries out projects in collaboration with national and international arts organizations; and holds performances and concerts in its own space.

[Video Talk] by Geert Vermeire and Stefaan van Biesen about Urban Emptiness Q-02 Brussels 2016.

## Listening to silence.

Quadrophonic sound installation Silent Pockets by students of RITCS at QO-2 Brussels.  
Real and Imaginary Embodied Landscapes / Molenbeek Brussels, 7 June 2016 – 9 June 2016.  
An action of the Urban Emptiness network Edinburgh–Athens–Brussels.

Silent Pockets has the ambition to investigate sonically quieter spots in an otherwise very noisy city. Three RITCS master students, Margot Otten, Amber Meulenijzer and Loic Thaler, were given the assignment to find relatively quieter public locations within the Brussels central pentagon.

Amber and Loic went for alleys and Margot chose an open, but below street level, monument on a square. They recorded the location and its immediate, louder, surrounding and found a way to present the dynamic contrast as a quadrophonic sound installation.



## [Urban Emptiness] Fading Into Silence / Video Talk ∞ Edinburgh 2016.

[Video Talk] by Geert Vermeire and Stefaan van Biesen about Urban Emptiness Edinburgh 2016. Location: the house of Sam Kirke in Edinburgh. Camera by Annemie Mestdagh. A talk about the silence projects of the Milena principle.

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## [Urban Emptiness] Fading Into Silence / Urban Tea Ritual ∞ College of Arts Edinburgh 2016.

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 the city.

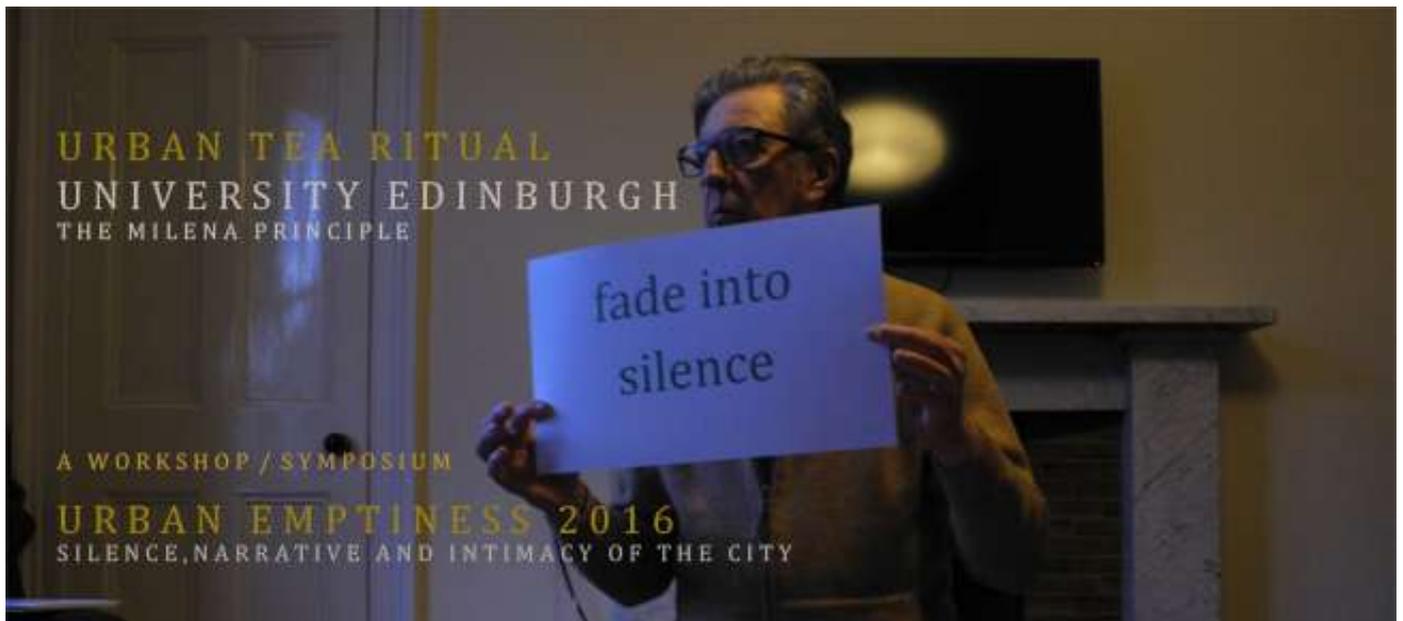
Geert Vermeire wrote: Dear all, with greatest pleasure. Stefaan's and my presence is completely based the approach of being "passerby" via nomadic interactions with you, the workshop participants and residents, interweaving ourselves (visible/invisible) in the ongoing processes during that week.

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 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 Nikolas Remy (Volos) Giorgos Samantas (Athens) Katerina Taliani (Edinburgh) Elli Vassalou (Brussels).



## 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 artistic 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.

Second part of *Water Carrier* [For I am water now], an art project travelling through various European cities with the underlying thought that we are water.

Artistical materials (videos, soundscapes, performances, texts and prints) are created in Venice in September 2015 and presented in Athens in October 2015.

Part one was realized in Portugal at the Museum Nogueira da Silva, Braga, in October 2014. Part two in the Italian Cultural Institute in Athens Greece October 2015.



An art project in various European cities with the underlying thought that we are water. Central activity in Athens Greece is an art performance based on a tea ritual. Parallel event is an exhibition depicting a flow of drawings, prints and videos and an installation in the Italian Institute in Athens.

We redefine the tea ritual on an artistic way as a philosophical and artistical meeting place, a resonating field of visual poetry and togetherness in a "politics of the heart", incorporating the utopic desire to a harmonious living together, an unconditional engagement in a field without distances, nor hierarchy.

It is the echo of a humane democracy that is lost in our world.

The tea ceremony is multidisciplinary.

Conversations, sound, soundscapes, smell, gestures are integrated. Parallel events are a series of performances and talks based on the topic and an exhibition with a flux of drawings, prints and the video-performances 'We wish we were like water' (Braga, Museu Biscainhos 2010), 'Writing in water' (Venice Biennale 2007 & 2015) and 'Liquid islands' (Venice Biennale 2011) next to the video-poems "Antarctica" (Brasilia, 1a Feira Intercional do Livro / Museu Nacional) connected to the installation 'Spirals/Mater' including a public performance. Production: the Milena principle.