



TEATTERIKORKEAKOULU
TEATERHÖGSKOLAN

2013

OPINNÄYTETYÖ

Moving the Silence

A dialogue between art and spirituality

GABRIELE GORIA

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MASTER DEGREE PROGRAMME IN THEATRE PEDAGOGY



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<p>This work illustrates the research I have conducted throughout the two years of my Master's degree programme in Theatre Pedagogy at the Theatre Academy of Helsinki (TeaK) on the topic of “active” silence: a quiet dimension of being, calm but not passive, characterized by a high level of awareness, openness and concentration at the same time.</p> <p>In March 2012 I led a one-day workshop with the title “Living the Silence” in seven different environments (among them: a school, two monasteries and a Theatre Academy), where I explored many possible combinations of art and meditation, in order to understand how the participants experienced “active” silence.</p> <p>In November 2012 I further developed my previous research on “active” silence by leading a two week-workshop, “Moving the Silence”, attempting to understand how I could develop a dialogue between different disciplines related to the practice of active silence such as meditation, T'ai Chi Ch'üan (the Chinese “Supreme Polarity boxing”) and expressive movement, without use of speech.</p> <p>The workshop led spontaneously towards a performance with the same title “Moving the Silence”, where I have been exploring the boundaries between meditation and performance, questioning how meditation can be a performance and vice-versa. We performed in February 2013.</p> <p>Silence proved to be a fruitful ground for a dialogue between art and spirituality, becoming a generative platform for developing meditative ways of working in the field of art.</p> <p>This thesis provides a detailed description of this work and the development of my personal conceptions about teaching.</p>			
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1. INTRODUCTION

The world has forgotten the joys of silence, the peace of solitude which is necessary, to some extent, for the fullness of human living. Not all men are called to be hermits, but all men need enough silence and solitude in their lives to enable the deep inner voice of their own true self to be heard at least occasionally.

(Merton 1957, 167)

The purpose of this work is to illustrate the research I have conducted throughout the two years of my Master's degree programme in Theatre Pedagogy at the Theatre Academy of Helsinki (TeaK) on the topic of “active” silence: a quiet dimension of being, calm but not passive, characterized by a high level of awareness, openness and concentration at the same time. This thesis will provide a detailed description of this work and the development of my personal conceptions about teaching.

According to the different phases of the research process, my research question developed into three consecutive steps:

- **How did the participants of my workshops experience active silence?**
- **How can I develop a dialogue between different disciplines related to the practice of active silence such as meditation, T'ai Chi Ch'üan (the Chinese “Supreme Polarity boxing”) and expressive movement, without use of speech?**
- **How can meditation be a performance and vice versa?**

In March 2012 I led a one-day workshop with the title “**Living the Silence**” in seven different environments (among them: a school, two monasteries and a Theatre Academy), where I explored many possible combinations of art and meditation, making use of analogic drawing, Ch'i Kung (Chinese breathing techniques developing inner energy) , T'ai Chi Ch'üan, Orazio Costa mimic method (an Italian method of body expressivity), writing and reading exercises, in order to understand **how the participants experienced active silence**. I collected their own written feedbacks, which became the main material of my analysis. A brief summary of this research is contained in Chapter 2 of the present work.

In November 2012 I further developed my previous research on active silence by leading a two week-workshop in cooperation with Eerika Arposalo (graduating in the Master's degree programme in Dance pedagogy at TeaK) and Rev. Henri Järvinen. The title of the event was “**Moving the Silence**”, since this time we focused on **the possibilities of interaction between meditation, T'ai Chi Ch'üan and expressive movement, working without use of speech**. The description of the process of planning is in Chapter 3; the contents of the workshop, the interactions among them and some reflections about my pedagogical strategy are the topics of Chapter 4.

The workshop led spontaneously towards a performance with the same title “**Moving the Silence**”: together with some participants in the workshop we deepened the previous research, working without use of speech for a period of over three months, in a “monastic-like” atmosphere, with the time cadenced by the sound of a bell, **exploring the boundaries between meditation and performance**. We performed in February 2013. The rehearsals-process and the performance are described in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6 includes some reflections about my pedagogical approaches throughout the process of research on silence.

The reason for the choice of silence as a topic is rooted in my own personal background.

1.1. A silent touch

I have spent much time seeking
without knowing that I was seeking.
Now I seek knowing
that I am seeking.
I hope to arrive and seek, knowing
what I'm seeking for.
(Sufi poem)

I was born in a multi-religious family: grandparents Catholic and parents followers of Paramahansa Yogananda (the first great Indian master who spent most of his life in the West, author of the spiritual classic “Autobiography of a Yogi” and founder of the Self-Realization Fellowship). As bilingual children naturally accept and learn two different languages as though they were one, I grew up with the Christian Gospel in one hand and the Hindu Bhagavadgita in the other. In the Catholic Church I was baptized with the name Gabriele, which means “the army of God”, and in the Self-Realization Fellowship I received a second baptism with the name Shanti Deva: “divinity of peace”. “War” and “peace”: this was the first symbolic contradiction of my life. As soon as I began to develop critical thinking, I started to notice differences between the two religious beliefs, and to question which one was the best, which one was my own, or should I abandon both and live without. At the age of nine I met my first master of traditional oriental martial arts: my thirst for

spirituality awakened in a new perspective, and I became familiar with the concept of dynamic meditation too. Later I met the theatre, which opened me to the horizon of self-expression.

During the teenage period, I felt the urge to choose one path and at the same time the impossibility of doing it. I began a painful internal struggle to decide which discipline I should sacrifice. I was captured by the trap of rationalism and logic: the opposites exclude each other, they cannot live together. I proceeded very slowly, with frustration, discouragement, anger.

When I graduated from Theatre Academy (Roma, 2001), I started to mix my competences together, developing combinations of theatre and martial arts, experiencing art's potentialities in relation with particular areas of spirituality, such as Eastern meditation, Christian prayer and personal dialogue with the holy scriptures.

My internal struggle began to calm down when I realized that there was a very concrete link between all my passions, a place where everything could live together in peace at the same time: myself. But still there was a distance between this theoretical understanding and its practical realization. I felt the need to dig deeper into my spirit.

I have been trying for years to learn the habit of meditating regularly morning and night. I gave up many and many times. I could not sit still longer than five minutes, because I had intense cramps in my back, probably related to my nervousness. I read many books about meditation, joined meditation groups, spoke with monks. I could not come out of my difficulty.

A few years ago I went to Assisi and visit an old Indian monk: Father Anthony Elenjittam, direct disciple of Mahatma Gandhi. I had already read some of his books and I had heard of him since my childhood: my parents met him thirty years before, he was a legendary figure in my imagination. He was

ninety-five when I met him the first time: a fragile, small old man, not taller than one metre and a half, sitting in silence at the bottom of a little room full of people. He had his eyes closed, he looked as if he was sleeping, but I felt his magnetic presence filling the whole room. I was attracted by the wave of peaceful energy emanating from the monk. Then I noticed with disappointment that I had to sit on one of the most uncomfortable metal chairs I could imagine for my poor back. And it was very far from the exit door: I was locked among all the people, with no way out.



Anthony Elenjittam (1915-2011)
Disciple of Mahatma Gandhi and Dominican Father,
founder of the Welfare Society for Destitute Children,
of Aquinas Publications and of Sat-Cit-Ananda Mission.

After a few minutes, the monk opened his eyes and prayed aloud in a sweet low voice: he pronounced mantras in Sanskrit, Latin, Arabic and Italian, drawing by heart from many different religious traditions. Even though my back pain had already started, I felt I didn't want to move from the chair: there was no other place in the world where I wanted to be. The room was very poor, the people around me extremely simple, the monk was humble and delicate, but at the same time he had a charismatic presence and, most of all, I trusted him without reserve: I had the intuition that he really embodied the words he was saying. He was a living example of a life dedicated to spiritual search. For the first time in my life I succeeded in meditating for one hour. After that day, I had no more difficulties in sitting still longer and longer, intensifying my daily meditation periods. Little by little, my pain reduced more and more.

Silence entered into my daily life. It helped me in facing my own inner reality: it gradually became the ground where all the aspects of my life could find a connection. I began questioning what kind of silence that was. I realized that the direct responsibility for my internal change lay not with silence itself, but with my attitude towards it. I was no longer passive, I was tasting the silence with a constant effort to remain alert, awakened, opened and focused. I was walking on the path of the “active” silence and I felt the urge to share my experience with other people.

Father Anthony Elenjmittam passed away at the age of ninety-seven in my native city Torino, where he went for his last conference over one year ago. In the same period I was planning to structure my first silence-workshop: “Living the Silence”.

This splendid master awakened in me a stronger will and determination with the gentle touch of his focused stillness. He did not impose on me a path to follow, but he offered me his own living example. He made me realize that we are the main cause of our internal separations and that we have the duty to find the source of peace, unity, light and joy within ourselves.

Every time I close my eyes and I sit still, his lovely presence continues to whisper silent blessings into my heart.

1.2. Ling



Ling: quick, alert, efficacious, spirit, soul.

The ideogram originally designates a magic ritual: man is offering something

precious to the sky by means of ritualistic dances in order to propitiate an abundant rain, essential in a civilization based on the cultivation of rice. In fact the image is composed, starting from the top, of the sky, clouds, falling rain, containers of jade and dancing people in between the earth and the sky. Through the ages it came to mean not only a supernatural power, but also the transcendental energy, that subtle spiritual substance proper to human beings: the soul. (Fassi, Cuturello, Magni, Tomatis 2012, 187)

This ideogram is part of the suggestions for the correct practice of the T'ai Chi Ch'üan: oral instructions taught by master Yang Ch'eng Fu and recorded by Ch'en Wei Ming in T'ai Chi Ch'üan Shu (The Art of T'ai Chi Ch'üan), first published in 1925 by Ch'en's school. (Wile 1983, 9) In that context "Ling" designates a refined inner readiness, essential for transforming the practice of T'ai Chi Ch'üan into a dynamic meditation, together with Hsü, emptiness.

When I saw the ideogram during my studies of the philosophies connected with traditional Chinese martial arts, I immediately related it to the practice we developed during the long process of research of the event "Moving the Silence". The image was like a picture, a photo of a magic instant that happened in China thousands of years ago, and by some fascinating chance being repeated in the rooms of a Theatre Academy: here we are, our group of people, miming elements of nature contained in some vessels, or practising the T'ai Chi form, working on the boundaries between performance and meditation, just as those men were acting a ritual which was at the same time a sincere prayer. The ideogram could also become an inspiration, a challenge and the core of our practice: could we be able to develop the same kind of attention, magic awareness, with a reverent feeling of waiting, as those ancient Chinese men were certainly experiencing during such special ritualistic moments?

2. LIVING THE SILENCE

I take no action and people are reformed.
I enjoy peace and people become honest.
I do nothing and people become rich.
I have no desires and people return to the good and simple life.

(Tao Te Ching, 57)

While choosing silence as the topic of my teaching practice, I knew I was challenging one of my safety tools as a teacher: my speaking ability. I often use words to vehicle my own enthusiasm and to build a generative working atmosphere. During the one-day workshop “Living the Silence” (March 2012) I forced myself to reduce the explanations to short essential sentences. Then I had to let my pupils work, without any possibility on my part to interfere during the exercitations. I realized in that way that the use of words was not exactly my strong point: my speech was shaping the creativity of my pupils into a structure I had in my mind, robbing them of the possibility to discover new surprising solutions. I previously used to talk during pupils’ exercitations, with the intention to lead them quickly to a better and more focused result. My words were actually affecting the pupils’ execution, leading them to my own personal goal, but preventing them from responsibly and freely exploring their own potential. I did not trust their own capacity of self-education.

Now I had a shocking surprise: the more I put myself apart, the more the inner teacher of each pupil started to awaken.

On some occasions, the working atmosphere became so focused that I joined the practice of my pupils. I was no longer a teacher, but a researcher with the others. I just put my energy together with my pupils’ energy, we worked in silence and that was all. Somehow, the same energy that I used to impart to the class by means of my words was now running free from my mental

patterns. I was offering my pure presence. The teaching process, if there was any, was happening on a “spiritual” level in the form of a mutual silent sharing of being.

Externally, I think it was not possible to observe any remarkable sign, since all the activities, both the meditative and the creative ones, were quite minimalistic. But the intensity of the experience emerged clearly from the feedbacks of the participants: both the positive and the negative feelings (peace and difficulty of concentration, awareness and embarrassment, acceptance or irritation) were quite often related to their own life situation, expectations, will. The practice of silence became a useful tool to find a connection between the deep centre of the participants and their own everyday life. Even though in that context we had not further developed the experience, for example reversing the process so that a meditative attitude towards everyday life could affect one’s creative expression, I began to think that silence could facilitate an artistic and spiritual exchange in attunement with the thought of the American pedagogue John Dewey:

The task is to restore the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events.

(Dewey 2005, 2)

2.1. Time perception

I experienced a feeling of peace and the feeling was that of letting go of sorrow or anxiety, as in the silence they could be received “from on high”. In the dimension of “shared” silence, I had the feeling that the time was moving in another dimension. I would like always to have that sense of time, the rediscovered inner time.

(from a participant’s feedback, “Living the Silence”-workshop in Torino Spiritualità, Torino)

After the “Living the Silence”- workshop sessions, I analyzed the participants’ feedbacks in terms of perception of time and perception of silence. I collected

three different typologies of feedback regarding the perception of the time-flow during the practice of active silence.

First typology. Some participants wrote that they lost the sense of time and that they had the relieving feeling of being in the moment. Atemporality is one of the basic qualities deriving from the operations of the right hemisphere of the brain, together with intuitional capacity, concrete perception of the things as they are in the present moment, spatiality, global and synthetic view of reality (Edwards 2011, 60). In this case, the participants had been able to step aside from the usually predominant hegemony of the rational side of the brain.

Second typology. Other participants wrote that for certain exercises the time was too long and demanding in terms of concentration, or challenging in terms of embarrassment, and on the other hand for other activities the time was too short for an exhaustive exploration. I think that in this case the participants could not find a way to release the rational control over themselves. Frustration may occur when the rational mind desperately attempts to lead processes such as meditating or drawing, where the brain's activity is non-verbal and non-rational. Characteristics of the functions of the left side of the brain are an analytical and symbolical approach towards problems, abstract and logical elaboration of data, linear and temporal thinking. (Edwards 2011, 60)

Third typology. A third kind of feedback indicated an agreeable status of awareness of the time-flow with a feeling of harmony between the proportion tasks-durations. In my opinion, this represented a condition of balance between the right faculties and the left faculties of the brain, in which they helped each other to transform the workshop's practices in real time into a deep experience.

If the first and the third typology of answers manifest feelings of pleasure and

openness, the second one is the voice of discomfort. I have tested different durations with the same kind of tasks, along the course of my teaching practice, and I have noticed that the discomfort areas seemed to be disconnected from the timing factor, even though the participants were stressing that time was the problem. For example, I proposed the exercise of looking into a partner's eyes with variations of timing: sometimes the task lasted twenty minutes, others ten or five, according to the different places where I held the workshop. The discomfort-answers were always related to the difficulty of looking into another person's eyes for a "*such a long time*". So, I began to think that the discomfort was related more to the exercise in itself rather than to its duration. But the analysis of the feedbacks showed that positive and negative feelings were actually equally distributed in every kind of task and the same person could experience the same task differently, when it was repeated twice. I argued consequently that the real cause of these different ways of perceiving the experience of silence should be connected with the inner attitude of every person. How to help it? How to awaken an inner attitude of openness and acceptance, without forcing it?

Already from the beginning of the workshop the silence was quite deep and deepened towards the end. I found it a very different kind of silence when we spent 20 minutes looking into each other's eyes. The silence itself was the same but one was very deeply aware of an other individual. The presence of her made the silence, I think not deeper, but somehow it was on two levels: in me and between her and me. When we were in the chapel I was very aware of the presence of the others, and again in the beginning of that meditation the silence was on two levels: in me and among us all. Then there was only the silence, nothing more, no feeling or awareness of the others.

(from a participant's feedback, "Living the Silence"-workshop in Tammisalo Church, Helsinki)

Observing the evolution of the quality of the participants' presence during each workshop, and comparing it with their own feedbacks, I have noticed that time has been the protagonist of internal positive changes. The gradual lengthening of the duration of silence and the repetition of some exercises offered the participants the opportunity to find an internal source, which helped them to handle the discomfort. I found a clear resonance with the Zen provocation: "*if something is boring after five minutes, try after one hour!*".

2.2. *Perception of silence*

I've experienced the silence as a moment of peace, in which I had no worries; it's very unusual that my class is concentrated on being quiet and I've discovered it gives a feeling of pleasure. It has been a new experience which has enriched me from the point of view of self-control, because I've realized better that being in silence doesn't just mean closing your mouth.

(from a thirteen-year-old participant's feedback, "Living the Silence"-workshop in primary school, Gassino)

This is a representative feedback of a participant of the "Living the Silence"-workshop, where it emerges how silence in itself has been experienced as a natural generator of peace and positive feelings. "Pleasure", "natural" and most of all "peace" are recurrent words in participants' feedbacks. In many cases these feelings are described in terms of surprise or discovery of something precious and necessary. The participants have often expressed the wish to make the practice of silence become a part of their daily life, often making use of poetic images, such as in the following feedback:

The workshop was interesting, useful and I shall continue on this path. After the workshop I felt really good both days and felt that I am a tree (a common idea for me but I tend to forget it) and most significantly started to feel more conscious.

(from a participant's feedback, "Living the Silence"-workshop in NÄTY, Tampere)

They have usually described the silence by means of short expressions, adjectives or words, as if they were attempting at the same time to let the silence "be in silence", such as in the following definitions.

Silence was:

- natural

- comfortable
- peaceful and light
- energy
- calming
- a reservoir of peace
- the space between me and my problem
- interruption to the daily noise

Among the participants who already had the practice of silence in their own background (meditation, T'ai Chi, Yoga, silent prayer), the structure of the proposed exercitations offered them the possibility to explore silence from new perspectives or to deepen their own self-awareness.

Some of them enjoyed comparing their own meditation methodologies with those of the workshop, finding analogies and differences. In some cases, they felt relief when they could meet something apparently distant from the context of spirituality, such as drawing, which was experienced more as an exercise of self-expression, shaping emotions and at the same time allowing the participants to take distance from them.

The practice of silence aroused thoughts connected with participants' personal life situations. They often wrote that they could look at their problems more objectively and they could find something new and helpful to deal with them. Some of the participants manifested frustration because they could not be focused without being disturbed by their own thoughts. Especially the thirteen-year-old participants had a demanding attitude towards themselves concerning the concentration.

Many thoughts were expressing the need for silence in the world and in daily

life. Some participants underlined the importance of silence as a tool for inner balance and for peace in society. Even though the activities of the workshop did not provide moments of verbal sharing, I observed a progressive attunement among the participants, and their written feedbacks manifested a spontaneous impulse of opening their personal discoveries to the rest of the world.

2.3. *Active silence*

The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character, and will. An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence.

(James 1961, 424)

Attention has been defined by psychologists as the process through which some parts of sensorial information are codified and elaborated, while others are not taken into consideration (Valenza 2002). The greater the concentration, the greater the possibility to retain data and consequently to elaborate an experience. Silence can be a privileged field to train the capacity of attention, whenever it offers the conditions to develop an active perceptive attitude.

The Italian biologist Giuseppe Barbiero suggests a distinction between *passive* and *active* silence.

Passive silence is externally imposed. The mind's attitude is like an *empty* container which needs to be continuously filled with new impulses. The attention is *captured* by means of increasingly entertaining and distracting stimulations. The frenetic race for stimulations which force the attention to be

passively and easily attracted, typical of contemporary society, seems to be one of the causes of the increasing diffusion of diseases such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Active silence, in contrast, is an act of commitment which comes from within and opens the attention to a new dimension, making the action, physical or intellectual, fluid and effective: the mind is *full* of awareness. Active silence *forms* the capacity of attention, by giving time for waiting, listening and elaborating. Meditation may be considered a basic exercise of active silence, training the attention and generating a state of calmness: the heartbeat slows down, as do the brain's waves; other areas of the brain, usually inhibited by the flux of thoughts, are activated. (Barbiero, Benessia, Bianco, Camino, Ferrando, Freire & Vittori 2007, 33-34) The effect is generally temporary, but regular practice during time seems to gradually modify the anatomic structure of the brain and its correlated functions, and to make the transformation permanent. Active silence has been found to be an effective tool for preventing hyperactivity, improving the capacity of sensing the world and nature, developing empathy and compassion. (Barbiero, Benessia, Bianco, Camino, Ferrando, Freire & Vittori 2007, 49-51)

Active silence, making us aware of the flow of our thoughts and emotions, helps us to observe them with non-attachment, as they are, without judgment. It helps us not to identify ourselves with the products of our mind - "our" thoughts, "our" emotions - but to realize we are other than them, attaining little by little an awareness which is no longer only cognitive, nor only emotional, but deep.

(Barbiero, Benessia, Bianco, Camino, Ferrando, Freire & Vittori 2007, 46)

I have found an interesting parallel with Barbiero's scientific view about "passive" and "active" silence in the words of Thomas Merton:

Silence has many dimensions. It can be a regression and an escape, a loss of self, or it can be presence, awareness, unification, self-discovery. Negative silence blurs and confuses our identity, and we lapse into daydreams or diffuse anxieties. Positive silence pulls us together and makes us realize who we are, who we might be, and the distance between these two.

(Merton 1969, article originally published in *The Baptist Student*, the student newspaper of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky).

The experience of the workshop “Living the Silence” reinforced my conviction that many artistic disciplines may be included in the practice of active silence, since they offer the same kind of conditions, facilitating processes of self-awareness, and I believe that a parallel practice of meditation and art may produce empowering creative interactions, helping a balanced human growth.

It is true that, historically, the path of silence has always been a common feature of the mystics both in the West and in the East, but we can find it also among philosophers, scientists and artists. Nowadays bridges of mutual exchange are rising between eastern and western traditions, offering opportunities for new explorations in the practice of active silence. Yoga and Zen meditation, for example, have been brought into hospitals as therapeutic tools against stress and depression, and into Theatre Academies as mind-training for actors and dancers. In the last twenty years, neuroscientists have started observing the cerebral activities during sleep, dream and meditation, discovering the existence of mirror neurons and working out new concepts like the idea of the “embodied mind” (Barbiero, Benessia, Bianco, Camino, Ferrando, Freire & Vittori 2007, 16). Meditation has also been introduced into primary schools’ curriculums, in order to help children in “*developing attention, listening capacity, contact and observation of the emotions, expression of creative abilities (...), calmness, a sensitive and more aware relationship with the natural environment*” (Barbiero, Benessia, Bianco, Camino, Ferrando, Freire & Vittori 2007, 17-18).

In the end of the sessions of the “Living the Silence”-workshop, I felt I had opened a remarkably fruitful process that could not simply stop there. I had started my research focusing on the effects of silence on people, but probably the most “affected” person was me, both as a teacher and as a human being. My workshops had actually provided intense but very short experiences to the participants, while I had the possibility to deal with silence for one entire

month. What kind of potential was hidden behind the curtains of silence? Would it be possible to develop a “pedagogy of silence”, maybe looking for new exercises? How could I use the results of my first research? These became topics of the following workshop “Moving the Silence”, where we used the silence as a privileged space for the exploration of possible interactions between meditation, T'ai Chi Ch'üan and expressive movement.

3. PLANNING

Moved by the curiosity towards new possible developments, I desired to dig deeper in the ground of silence, creating a research-team which could commit for a longer period.

When I first met Eerika Arposalo, I did not yet know that she had led dance workshops in silence and had written her own research seminar work on the same topic as me. The title of her seminar paper was “Hiljaisuutta iholla”, which I could translate as “Silence on the skin”. I did not even know that Eerika was a committed meditator, regularly practising Vipassana meditation (an ancient Indian technique of meditation, transmitted by Buddhist tradition). But I felt attunement, I was fascinated by her own joyful and meditative life style. We had the opportunity to get to know each other at the end of my first year at Theatre Academy (TeaK), when Eerika came back to school after a maternity leave. I had the good fortune to plan my final work with her.

We agreed that silence was a good starting point to look for meditative ways of working in the field of art: we could for example search for interactions between meditation and some discipline of movement, maybe inventing new exercises, attempting to improve our own strategies of teaching without use of words.

We decided in a first instance to share one by one all the experiments we did in our previous workshops about silence, organizing open classes and inviting friends in the hope of finding some partner willing to join our research-team. Eerika showed her own way of building dance choreographies in silence, introduced us to a training composed of several exercises of self-awareness

like walking and running at high speed combined with extremely slow walking, meditation moments, minimalistic somatic warm up which gradually became powerful expressive dance, exercises of sensorial memory in slow speed and many other practices. After eight encounters we started to select the topics we were most interested in teaching in a potential workshop of two weeks, with the possibility to develop the experience later in form of a performance: that could guarantee us an even longer time for our research. Among the friends we had invited to our experimental meetings, Rev. Henri Järvinen, the University's chaplain, decided to join our team. His presence has been an unexpected gift: his own knowledge was crossing many traditions and beliefs and he revealed later that he was able to offer us important tools to begin an inner work of self-discovery.

At this point our procedure had a remarkable shift. We started to meet and meditate in silence. Our meditation sessions went on regularly for one month. Then we established one extra day every week of one-hour meditation opened to all the students of the school. We discovered that many other students were interested in meditation and little by little our silent meetings gathered together a small but committed group. I realize now the value of our silent meetings: the establishment of a spiritual attunement between me, Eerika and Rev. Henri, reinforcing our mutual trust and becoming little by little a warm relationship of friendship.

If meditation was a common background for all three of us, for my part I decided to take special care of the T'ai Chi Ch'üan part. Among the methods of expressive movement, my contribution has been Orazio Costa's mimic method. Eerika decided to develop further some topics of her own previous research project, among them: slow walking, weight shifting and movement patterns. Rev. Henri was in charge of the meditation sessions, teaching Zen and Christian meditation (the Ignatian spiritual exercises), Mindfulness and the Japanese art of arranging flowers: Ikebana.

3.1. Preconceptions

Before starting the workshop “Moving the Silence”, many doubts and preconceptions were still bothering me.

Sitting meditation and T'ai Chi Ch'üan have common roots, at least in the environment of Taoism, and share the same goal of enlightenment and emptiness (not apathy, of course, but freedom from the restless flow of thoughts and emotions: an expanded level of awareness). Otherwise I was not sure that the same connection could be found with the teaching part of Rev. Henri: what about the presence in the same workshop of Christian meditation and Mindfulness? Because of my own personal experience, a part of me felt sure that in the very end it was possible to find a meeting point, but how would the participants of the workshop react? On a theoretical level the differences between the philosophical and historical backgrounds of such distant traditions were hard obstacles to deal with.

The choreographic potential of T'ai Chi Ch'üan is a clear link with performative arts and expressive movement. But again, I could not guarantee that Eerika's approach towards movement explorations would work in attunement with the basic principles and purposes of the T'ai Chi Ch'üan. What if the dance-explorations worked in the opposite direction? What if the workshop were to become a struggle between disciplines encouraging inner balance and other activities spreading all the energy outwards? And also on my side, I was still looking for deeper meeting points between T'ai Chi Ch'üan and the Orazio Costa mimic method. I am aware now that I was giving too much space to abstract intellectual doubts, instead of focusing on a more constructive attitude of planning. There came back to the surface an ancient preconception still rooted in me: the never ending fight between East and

West, between my being Christian and Hindu at the same time. The coexistence of these two natures in me was still in a certain measure an unsolved problem. A part of me was already in peace and whispered: “Just go on, the work and the silence will take care of everything!”. But my rational mind was secretly working to point out differences. As soon as I realized that, I decided to face the question openly and to treat it intellectually with the same tools of interreligious dialogue: I had to be ready to motivate our pedagogical choices also on a rational level, since my doubts might also awaken in the participants. I needed to start my teaching practice on a clear ground, starting a personal confrontation between eastern and western philosophies connected with the respective artistic traditions. I began to read theoretical books about meditation, T'ai Chi Ch'üan and interreligious dialogue: this has been a marvelous opportunity for me to understand my roots and to become more aware of my own patterns.

In the artistic field, there is an apparently insuperable wall between the eastern “analogic” pedagogical pattern and the western “digital” one. Think for example, in the theatrical environment, of Stanislavski’s method in the American version, the Strasberg method: the original is very slow, profound and “spiritual”; Strasberg’s is more rapid, structured and “scientific”.

Generically speaking, in the West art has been mostly used as a vehicle of ideals, culture, provocations and emotions, and we could say that its main focus has very often been the effect on the audience, even in the extreme cases where the spectator is deliberately not considered. In the eastern tradition art has been most of all regarded as a path of introspection whose main goal was the spiritual fulfilment of the artist.

We can observe many significant details, confirming this statement: Indian classical dance is characterized by closed figures and inwardly turned gestures; western classical dance movements and postures are directed outwards; in the West, classical music has developed the polyphonic system,

which allows the sounds to “travel” in many directions, filling the space; in the eastern musical tradition we find a meticulous exploration of melody, as sounds are digging deeper and deeper in the same chord, like a spiral, entering directly into the soul; among the arts of fighting, the West has focused its efforts on developing disciplines based on explosive muscular power, such as boxing, or in other cases athletic fighting sports such as fencing, in which the main goal is “killing” or hitting the opponent, while in the East we have such a unique case in history, where martial arts are inseparable from spirituality and their strength lies in the development of internal energy, promoting a philosophy of non-violence. It is not a matter of chance that the two most popular styles of traditional Chinese Kung Fu, the Shaolin Ch'üan and the T'ai Chi Ch'üan, were structured in a Buddhist and in a Taoist monastery respectively. (Chang & Fassi 2008)

In order to facilitate a real encounter between religions, the renowned theologian Raimon Panikkar (1918-2010) suggests an approach of “interpenetration” and “mutual fecundation” (Panikkar 2008, 70) and he points out three basic criteria to make that possible: honesty in the search for truth wherever you can find it, intellectual openness without biased opinions and deep loyalty towards your own tradition. (Panikkar 2008, 70) I began to think that the essence of these suggestions could also be applied to the dialogue between artistic traditions.

The first point, “honesty in the search for truth”, opened the enormous question: what is truth in art? I cannot imagine a universally valid answer for such a wide subject, and fortunately I think it is not even necessary: the question touches me when I start to reason about my personal and relative perception of truth. I could translate the word “truth” into the more subjective concept of “interest”. I believe that meditation, T'ai Chi Ch'üan and expressive movement are co-operating whenever I find in them common aspects belonging to my current interests: the possibility of working in silence, looking for meditative approaches towards art and attempting at the same time to

maintain a creative attitude in meditation.

The second suggestion about “intellectual openness without biased opinions” invited me to get rid of the commonplaces in eastern and western traditions, looking at the different disciplines as they are in the present moment for me. I immediately reminded myself that there are also western teaching methods whose main purpose is the spiritual search. According to the Christian tradition, the “spirit” (*pneûma*) is defined as the central or superior part of the “soul” (*psyché*): the sphere of will and intuition, of faith and love. (Boff 2010, 24) Therefore spiritual search could be defined as the search for the “God within us”, for our own inner self, or, from another point of view, the development of our own highest potential as human beings (Kriyananda 2008, 118). With a sense of relief I discovered that Orazio Costa too had a deep sense of spirituality and defined the actor as an “acrobat of the spirit”. In his pedagogical philosophy there was the idea that before forming a good artist, the teacher had the duty to form good persons. (Fisher 2012, 165)

The third point, “loyalty towards your own tradition”, suggested to me not to be in a hurry to mix together meditation, T'ai Chi Ch'üan and expressive movement: together with Eerika we took the decision to dedicate time for a separate practice, in order to first experience their own independent potential. I believe it is important to proceed in an organic way, allowing the “dialogue” to happen spontaneously when the time is right. This has been a fundamental point, affecting our procedure of leading the workshop. First of all, the decision to structure our process in two separate phases: one week of practice of several disciplines without any conscious attempt to mix them; a second week open to creative experiments of interdisciplinary dialogue.

“An authentic encounter may happen only where the two “realities” mutually come in touch”. (Panikkar 2008, 70) I finally opened my eyes and I started to find everywhere signs proving that nowadays the meeting points between

eastern and western traditions are exponentially increasing because of an internal need of the new globalized society. Paraphrasing another thought of Panikkar, I could say that while in the past the artistic research was essentially directed towards the unidirectional deepening of the specific artistic tradition of a single culture, the longing for authentic art of our times cannot ignore “this thirst of opening and of mutual understanding”. (Panikkar 2008, 70) I realized that in the artistic field and in pedagogy as well this “interpenetration” is already happening on the practical level, even though the theories behind the traditions each reflect a different history and philosophy.

To take an example: the American educator and curriculum theorist W. Doll proposes a pedagogical reform based on the post-modern principle of self-organization, with the idea of an educational path without pre-selected goals (Doll 1993); the traditional oriental pedagogy works in function of a single pre-selected goal, the most demanding one, which wholly challenges students’ capacities: perfection. Many eastern philosophies share the same starting point with post-modern thought: reality is relative, inexpressible. “The Tao which can be described by words is not the eternal Tao” says the first sentence of the Tao Te Ching. (Sabbatini 2009, 39) However, while post-modern thought is focused on dialogue as a creator of realities, oriental thought is entirely focused on the inexpressible reality. But from a practical point of view, since perfection is an infinite, this Utopian goal may correspond to the post-modern idea of a never ending, always expanding search. The physicist Sabbatini defines Taoism, for example, as a philosophy which is able to embrace the reality that quantum physics shows, because it places the act of experience as primary and fundamental, and the two poles subject-object as co-emerging in this act. (Sabbatini 2009, 26)

In the very end, art is always a means of self-expression, and the eastern and western approaches are less and less in contrast: in order to facilitate the best involvement of the audience, you need to improve your self-awareness and human potential; if you want to reach the goal of spiritual fulfilment, you

should include the others in your expansion of consciousness. Without minimizing the challenge of the co-existence in the same workshop of different kinds of meditation, T'ai Chi Ch'üan and expressive movement, I finally found good arguments to go beyond the layers of preconceptions concerning the eastern and western ways of making art. Art is a tool. It can be used in many different ways and for various purposes. My purpose is to look for a meditative approach towards art and at the same time to develop an artistic, creative attitude in spirituality, in order to keep it spontaneous, genuine and alive. The inspiring words of Rev. Henri and the unforgettable example of Father Anthony Elenjittam encouraged me to let go this fight of thoughts and to jump as soon as possible into practice.

Another unexpected help arrived from Eerika, the day she told me that in a forest close to Helsinki there was the opportunity to participate in a ten-day Vipassana retreat. I felt that I wanted to experience Vipassana meditation, in order to better understand Eerika's background, and even more to get rid of my restless thoughts: what a golden opportunity to meet the silence, before my work would start! For ten days I could be in total silence, without talking, reading or writing, and in isolation, since even eye contact with the other participants was forbidden. The meditation period was remarkably long: from 4 a.m. till 10 p.m.

I had never meditated so much before, especially sitting on the floor would be challenging: I applied.

3.2. Vipassana

Sisters of instants
clouds change,
while I am sitting.

(Dinajara Freire)

As soon as the retreat started, my own ego was crushed against the ascetic discipline we had to follow in order to climb on the mountain of introspection. I realized how much I was attached to my own personality and I perceived there was a subtle difference between my ego and my real “I”. If my own ego was the sum of my memories, experiences, thoughts, desires and habits, my real “I” was somehow beyond all that.

During the retreat I could not practice any other meditation technique but Vipassana, I could not pray according to my own religious belief, I could not train in Kung Fu and I could not have any contact with the external world. This challenge put me face to face with my strongest attachments, those fundamental elements which constitute the essential traits of my personality: Kriyā Yoga-meditation, my being Catholic, the practice of Kung Fu and my beloved five-year-old son Raffaele.

I began to feel like a prisoner in a rigid structure which gave me no space to breathe: we woke up at 4 a.m. and we had no time to do anything else but meditating, sitting in very uncomfortable postures on the floor, training in a meditation technique which was at the same time close to but different from the one I am used to practising. Every contact with the others, including eye contact, was forbidden. We did not eat dinner and we went to bed at 10 p.m. Small differences in the details of meditation technique and most of all the Buddhist philosophical context in which we had to merge were the most disturbing points for me. We were not working with inner energy and meridians or *cakras* like in Ch’I Kung in Taoist meditation or *prāṇāyāma* in Yoga meditation, and there was no space for prayer or whatever kind of devotional approach. As far as I could understand, Vipassana (Sanskrit: *vipaśyanā*), which means “to see the things as they really are” or “insight into the true nature of reality”, is an ancient Indian technique of meditation based on the attentive and impartial observation of breathing, body sensations and

thoughts. The search for God is somehow translated into a very practical principle, which is the search for true happiness and freedom. Training myself to avoid reactions dictated by attachment or aversion, being an impartial observer towards both pleasant and unpleasant experiences, I can finally be capable of free actions in life moved by real inner wisdom.

Being forced to meditate about eleven hours a day, together with the rule of silence, was a combination of elements that operated a therapeutic action in me. Without any apparent connection with the situation, I started to face memories of my past, unsolved questions, painful points, mistakes, persons that I have hurt and so on. But I could not share my inner struggle with anyone, I had to stand on my own two feet. The seventh day I arrived at such a pitch of exhaustion that I could not focus at all on the meditation. My mind was captured in the stream of my thoughts and I had no power to stop them. I felt I was in hell, even though the environment around me was a real heaven: I was surrounded by many persons willing to improve their own lives, meditating together with me, and we all were served by a team of volunteers who cooked for us and took care of every single need and detail. The place in the forest, close to a wonderful lake, was enchanting. I realized that the keys to happiness or sorrow are in our own hands and that, no matter what the external conditions may be, we always can find the “kingdom of God” within ourselves. I was close to the point of quitting the meditation hall and giving up the retreat. But then my heart exploded with a silent shout: I said to myself “Mother, help me! No matter if I can’t concentrate, no matter if my mind is somewhere else, I’ll not move a single muscle, I’ll not open my eyes until the meditation period ends!”. A tear dropped down from my eyes and suddenly I felt free: I could focus entirely on the meditation and I felt no more strain or pain for the rest of the days, devoting myself without reserves to Vipassana technique.

Training myself to observe my thoughts, acts and emotions, cultivating a sense of non-attachment and of open acceptance, showed me an unexpected side of the reality: the unreality of what I usually considered real, and the reality of something that I did not consider at all. If before this experience I blindly identified myself with my own personality, that is to say my natural inclinations and interests, my gender and nationality, my being a father and so on, now I began to perceive my personality more like a sort of “coat” that I was wearing: we may be many different persons in the period of a single day, with contrasting changes of moods and thoughts. And how many lives we live in one lifetime! Observing with equanimity the reality as it is, without adding my own beliefs and preferences, I started to understand what Bhuddist tradition names *anicca*: impermanence.

A fascinating question came to my mind: who then is that “being” who has been impartially observing these processes since I was born? I am not talking about the brain-memory, which may work better or worse, according to the seasons of life and health. I mean that inner sense of basic awareness which is before and beyond my own thoughts, which simply makes me perceive that I exist now. That inner witness, who has always been at peace, came gradually to the surface.

If we analyse the history of spiritual search, undertaken by saints and sages in the course of the ages, we discover that the spiritual perfection sought by means of introspective meditation could be attained only after having operated the discrimination between the ego and the true Self. (Elenjittam 1995, 19-20) Taking into consideration for example the teachings of the philosophical-religious Indian thought, such as the monistic system Advaita Vedānta, Reality is somehow divided into two levels: the transcendental Reality, *paramārthika*, and the concrete, daily reality, *vyāvahārika*. (Piano 1996, 172) Similarly, in the micro-cosmos of human beings we may operate a distinction between the Self and the ego. With different nuances the same

intuition can be found in Zen Buddhism and in many religious scriptures such as the Bible, the Koran and the Avesta. (Elenjmittam 1995, 20) Our own ego, which is the sum of our own memories, experiences, thoughts, desires, passions, is described as a sort of “mask”, which our own true Self uses in order to manifest and operate in the world as body and mind. (Elenjmittam 1995, 21)

This sense of self-awareness, never changing, never touched by the most terrible storm, that does not cease to exist even when I am sleeping: could that be me, my own real, true “I”? I started to re-consider the relativistic worldview typical of post-modernism. I began to perceive intuitively that there could be something “solid” beyond the ever-changing reality of my own personality. And I felt free, released from the attachment to all the expectations that I might have towards my life.

The retreat gave me the courage to take more risks for the workshop “Moving the Silence”. I knew now by experience the advantages and the problems of working in complete silence. Together with Eerika, we decided to lead the workshop in total silence and to ask the participants not to talk even during the pauses and lunch-breaks. At the same time I felt that the lack of eye contacts could be an obstacle if we were aiming towards a dimension of shared meditation and opening interactive creative processes. So, the second point we fixed was to allow communication to happen on a non-verbal level among the group of participants.

4. MOVING THE SILENCE – WORKSHOP

The two-week workshop “Moving the Silence” was shaped as an artistic-spiritual retreat. The only rule we asked the participants to respect was the silence, even during the breaks and lunch pauses. Breaks and changes of exercises were marked by means of a bell. The first three days Eerika and I took the liberty to still spend a few words in order to explain some technical details related to the practice, then we began to work in complete silence. We planned two moments for verbal sharing, the last hours of Fridays. On all the other days our meetings ended with half an hour of silent sharing, which could consist simply in looking into each other’s eyes or in more articulated actions.

We had the surprise to work with fifteen extremely committed participants, coming from very distant spiritual or artistic backgrounds: among them there were practitioners of Yoga, Mindfulness, Vipassana, Zen, Christian meditation, T'ai Chi Ch'üan, together with people absolutely new to meditative practices. We shared the same space and silence, but everyone was free to follow the methodology s/he felt most attuned to her/his own actual needs.

The first week was centred on the separate practice of different meditation techniques, Ch'i Kung and T'ai Chi Ch'üan, Orazio Costa mimic method and movement explorations.

The second week we worked with free improvisations, **looking for possible interactions between the different disciplines**, sharing the leadership with all the participants who were invited to write new tasks for the whole group day by day. Everyone was free to choose whether to explore the performative aspects or the meditative possibilities in each improvisation.

Even though the selection of the contents of the workshop had been fruit of a preliminary dialogue between me, Eerika and Rev. Henri, I cannot deny that this choice responded perfectly to my need to combine together the main passions of my life, looking for unity in an apparently contradictory group of disciplines.

In this chapter I will describe my own background with meditation, T'ai Chi and expressive movement, entering when necessary into some more detailed explanation about the practices. The description of every one of these disciplines will be followed by the explanation of their respective roles in the workshop "Moving the Silence", the interactions that happened among them and the effect of silence in my pedagogical strategy.

4.1. Meditation

My background with meditation is mainly related to the Kriyā Yoga taught by Paramahansa Yogananda (1893-1952): a spiritual path including some techniques of meditation which if regularly practised leads towards the goal of Self-realization, or realization of God. (Yogananda 2006, 401) I have recently included in my practice Vipassana meditation, from the Buddhist tradition, and I have some basic knowledge of Taoist meditation because of my experience in the field of martial arts, in particular with the practice of Ch'i Kung.

Yoga, from the Sanskrit "*yu*" (union), means the union between the individual soul and the Spirit. Yoga also designates the methods through which it is possible to reach this goal. (Yogananda 2006, 411) Yoga is one of the six orthodox systems of the Hindu philosophy: Vedānta, Mīmāṃsā, Sāṃkhya, Vaiśeṣika, Nyāya and Yoga. There are many Yoga-methods, such as

Hatha Yoga (a system of physical postures to purify the body), Karma Yoga (selfless service to the others), Mantra Yoga (repetition of certain root-word sounds representing a certain aspect of the Spirit), Bhakti Yoga (devotion to and worship of the Divinity in all creatures and in everything), Jñāna Yoga (the path of wisdom, emphasizing the application of discriminative intelligence to achieve spiritual liberation) and Rāja Yoga (the royal path of Yoga, formally systematized in the second century B.C. by the Indian sage Patañjali, which combines the essence of all other paths). (SRF 1997, 8-9) The Kriyā Yoga taught by Paramahansa Yogananda is considered a Rāja Yoga path, since it includes the essential characteristics of all the other methods, but the core of that practice is a technique of *prāṇāyāma* (life-energy control).

Kriyā reinforces and revitalizes subtle currents of life energy (*prāṇā*) in the spine and brain. The ancient seers of India (*ṛṣis*) perceived the brain and spine as the tree of life. Out of the subtle cerebrospinal centers of life and consciousness (*cakras*) flow the energies that enliven all the nerves and every organ and tissue of the body. The yogis discovered that by revolving the life current continuously up and down the spine by the special technique of Kriyā Yoga, it is possible to greatly accelerate one's spiritual evolution and awareness.

Correct practice of Kriyā Yoga enables the normal activities of the heart and lungs and nervous system to slow down naturally, producing deep inner stillness of body and mind and freeing the attention from the usual turbulence of thoughts, emotions, and sensory perceptions. In the clarity of that inner stillness, one comes to experience a deepening interior peace and attunement with one's soul and with God.

(Srf website: http://www.yogananda-srf.org/The_Kriya_Yoga_Path_of_Meditation.aspx#.UO7guHePSSo)

I initially had a personal doubt about proposing eastern meditation techniques together with Christian ones, since it had happened before in my working experience, especially in Catholic environments, to meet some theoretical resistance to accepting practices apparently discordant with the Christian religious tradition. Meditation, intended as the application of concentration on our own inner reality (Yogananda 2006, 404), has been considered in many philosophies and religions one of the most effective means to Self-realization. However, in particular in the western cultures, the term “meditation” has little by little been “rationalized”, becoming a synonym

of “intellectual reflection”. This is the result of the cultural stream of modernism, which has produced a pattern of education based on mechanical and logic efficiency, and relegating the creative intuition to a mere question of personal, accidental, individual skill (Doll 1993). But, as the most recent researches about the functions of the two hemispheres of the brain demonstrate, intuition can be trained and improved: it is not an unchangeable gift (Edwards 2011). Fortunately Rev. Henri proved to be exceptionally open-minded, being an expert himself in Zen meditation and Ignatian spiritual exercises. He also explained to us that in the ancient Christian tradition there was something extremely close to the concept of “meditation” as intended in the eastern cultures: the practice of contemplation.

Talking by contrasts, the theologian Clodovis Boff (1944-) underlines the importance of involving the right faculties of the brain in the process of meditation: “*meditating is not science, but wisdom. It's not knowledge, but taste. It's not talking about God, but talking to God. It's not learning, but experiencing*” (Boff 2010, 21). I would add, more extremely: meditation is not thinking, but listening. As Rev. Henri explained, recently Christian meditation has rediscovered the ancient goal of “contemplation”: the last step of the meditative process, where the intellectual reasoning ceases and leaves the place to listening and intuition. In the Catholic tradition contemplation is defined by listening, silence, union and communion of love. (Catechismo della Chiesa Cattolica 1999, 713-714) In this sense, the Christian tradition shares the same target as Eastern schools of meditation: emptiness. “*In contemplation the man knows without any effort*”, wrote, as early as 1600, one of the greatest mystics of the Society of Jesus in France. (Surin 1997, 340) But paradoxically, in order to attain such a result, a long regular effort is required. Here below I quote the words of the renowned Taoist master Da Liu (1904-2000) about emptiness, including a simple suggestion for the beginners in meditation.

The condition of emptiness described in the classics refers to the last level and the supreme goal of the meditative practice. For the beginner it is a mistake to fight against the distractions or to through away the thoughts. It is much better to focus on the processes which happen during the meditation, such as the slow and rhythmic flow of the breathing and the energy-flow along the psychic channels.

(Da Liu 1988, 72-73)

Meditation was the biggest commitment that I, Eerika and Rev. Henri made throughout the workshop: every day we began our practice with one hour of meditation, taking the risk of embarrassing or displeasing the participants. It did not happen. All of them, including the persons who were totally new to meditation, appreciated this practice and were able to overcome their initial difficulties, improving their own determination, concentration and personal commitment towards the whole of the activities of the workshop. In the very beginning Rev. Henri took charge of three meditation-lessons, during which he taught three different possible approaches to meditation: Christian meditation, Zen meditation and Mindfulness. On all the other mornings we practiced free silent meditations: everybody could follow her/his favorite practice, and possibly walk or lie down or move. Sharing together the same space in silence and concentration proved to be an intense and creative starting point for the following activities.

I soon felt that there were no more boundaries between the meditation and T'ai Chi Ch'üan or expressive movement. Every action, including the actions during breaks and lunch, was executed with such a high a level of awareness that I could not perceive any interruption in my flow of concentration. I think that the main contribution of meditation to the other practices has been this opening of our own capacity of attention, which happened as a natural consequence of our regular training.

4.2. *T'ai Chi Ch'üan*

A discipline that I consider a perfect conjunction between meditation and performative arts is the T'ai Chi Ch'üan (太極拳). This ancient discipline is at the same time a healthy exercise for the body, a form of dynamic meditation and a martial art. (Chang & Fassi 2010, 5)

My first approach with martial arts dates back to my childhood. I was eight when I tasted a bit of Judo, but I did not feel comfortable in such a sport-like activity, competition-based, characterized by a narrow range of techniques mainly focused on projections and falls and I quit the classes after a couple of months. I was nine when I began to regularly practice Ju Tai Jutsu (an ancient Japanese martial art) at the Yoshin Ryu in Torino, for five years. There I learned the basics of a spiritual attitude towards a dynamic physical training and the respect for tradition, master and fellows in the practice. My master Alessandro Nepote encouraged me to go beyond the techniques and to develop my own personal “poetry”. Despite his wonderful personality and remarkable pedagogical skills, I felt that Ju Tai Jutsu itself was lacking in a deep knowledge about the human body and mind with their interrelated dynamics.

At the age of fifteen I met Sergio Volpiano, my present instructor of Kung Fu, from the Kung Fu Chang school of Torino. For over 18 years I have been studying and training with him in the classical Kung Fu of northern China, as transmitted by the renowned Master Chang Dsu Yao (1918-1992). This meeting has deeply affected my life: Sergio’s teachings went much further than the mere practice of a martial discipline. Kung Fu has helped me to find a method to proceed with my school studies, to deal with life crises, to survive in the challenging period of the Theatre Academy in Italy.

Kung Fu (功夫) means “exercise acted with ability”, “work executed with

mastery” or in a wider meaning “thing well done”. This term is also used to define the whole of traditional Chinese martial arts, together with Wu Shu (武術, martial technique). These disciplines are extremely wide and complex and in order to be mastered require the commitment of a whole lifetime. The curriculum of studies in Kung Fu Chang school includes both internal and external styles. The first category (Nei Chia, 內家) comprises all those “soft” and “internal” styles, so named because of the importance given in them to the development of the internal energy. The second group (Wai Chia, 外家) is composed of all the “hard” or “external” styles, so named because of the importance given in them to a vigorous practice, where “external” characteristics of speed and power are put in evidence. (Chang & Fassi 1986, 17) The main Kung Fu’s external style is the classic Shaolin Ch’üan (少林拳) of the northern China and the best known internal styles are the T’ai Chi Ch’üan (太極拳), Pa Kua (八卦) and Hsing-I (形意). (Chang & Fassi 1986, 17)

T’ai Chi Ch’üan (太極拳) literally means “Supreme Polarity boxing”: it is therefore a martial art based on the principles of Yin-Yang, rooted in the non-violent and highly mystical philosophy of Taoism. T’ai Chi Ch’üan is the art of softness. As logical consequences of its practice there are the health of the body and the capacity of self-defence. But in order to reach such results it is necessary to breathe in the correct way, allowing the Ch’i (氣, breath-energy) to go down to Tan T’ien (丹田, the “Cinnabar’s field”), which is an important area situated about four fingers below the navel and four fingers inside the body, related to Taoist meditation and traditional Chinese medicine. (Chang & Fassi 2008, 351) In order to attain the most elevated status of awareness, the Ch’i (氣) should then be refined into a more spiritual form of energy, Shen (神), by reaching the top of the head and from there, reaching the point between the eyebrows, the energy may expand the mind into a state of super-consciousness: Hsü (虛), emptiness. (Chang & Fassi 2008, 69) The breathing techniques used in T’ai Chi Ch’üan are dealing with the same energy-channels

common to other oriental practices. That is why the practice of this discipline may be helped for example by a preliminary training in simple breathing exercises from Ch'i Kung and Yoga. (Da Liu 1988, 25) In the workshop "Moving the Silence" we always preceded the practice of T'ai Chi with meditation and Ch'i Kung.

The basic form of T'ai Chi Ch'üan should be executed slowly, without interruptions, in complete relaxation, the spine straight, in order to allow a free circulation of the breathing energy (氣, Ch'i) along the meridians, in the whole body. The body moves as if it was plunged in a dense liquid. The names of the techniques sometimes recall animals (birds, monkey, snake) or elements of nature (clouds, mountain, sea). This has been the first theoretical connection that I have found with the basics of the Orazio Costa mimic method, which encourages a spontaneous approach to the elements of nature.

Relationships between T'ai Chi Ch'üan and static meditation have been explored for hundreds of years, and they are considered by Taoist tradition two complementary aspects of the same path:

After the practice of T'ai Chi Ch'üan for a long period you should stop and pass to the meditation. After you have reached a remarkable calmness, you should start again to practice the movements of T'ai Chi Ch'üan in order to stimulate the blood circulation, freeing yourself from the bodily inactivity and relaxing the mind.

(Da Liu 1988, 14)

Recently the ascetic and mystical aspects of T'ai Chi Ch'üan have awakened the attention of Christian theologians, who have encountered the ancient Chinese discipline as an experience of prayer and meditation, not only in isolation but also in relationship with others (Fassi, Cuturello, Magni & Tomatis 2012, 145). This dimension of "shared" meditation was one of the cores of the workshop "Moving the Silence".

During the workshop I taught the first part of the long form of T'ai Chi Ch'üan Yang-style, as transmitted by the renowned Master Chang Dsu Yao, composed of 108 techniques. Chang Dsu Yao (1918-1992) was one of the most skilled pupils of Liu Pao Chün (1892-1947?), who was a direct pupil of Yang Ch'en Fu (1883-1936): the greatest promulgator of the practice of T'ai Chi Ch'üan in China. Master Yang Chen Fu belonged to a renowned family of Masters that for three generations had been developing the art of the T'ai Chi Ch'üan (before that, the secrets of T'ai Chi Ch'üan were the exclusive property of the Chen family). Yang Chen Fu developed some simplified forms (without martial applications, shortened, and without detailed explanations of traditional Chinese medicine), in order to promote a healthy and still precious exercise of dynamic meditation among the people. At the same time he continued to teach some sophisticated forms of T'ai Chi Ch'üan complete with martial applications and refined breathing techniques to a few pupils selected with care. (Chang & Fassi 2008, 10) Among those advanced forms is the one I was teaching in the workshop.

Teaching the form in silence, I encouraged the participants to follow it without fear of mistakes and without the pressure to remember the movements exactly: the purpose of those sessions was simply to gain confidence with the form in order to taste a combination of movement and breathing technique. Silence has forced me to find new ways to teach the techniques. I was often questioning myself: should I explain some important detail or not, should I correct my pupils or not, should I just show the form as a model, letting the participants make their own mistakes and proceeding at their own speed or is there a way to help them to grasp more quickly some fundamental skill...? I was afraid to step back to the old Chinese pedagogy, where some masters never gave corrections to their own pupils, since they thought it was useless to do so: *“a pupil will always repeat the same mistakes as long as he is unaware and when he becomes aware he'll need no more corrections”* (Fassi, Cuturello, Magni & Tomatis 2012, 41). On the other hand I did not want to take the opposite position: to impose my procedures on the others, forcing

them to learn “correctly”. Of course, the technique is something which presupposes precise rules, but I believe that every person has the right to attain the same skill walking on a personal path: I think knowledge can be really learnt only if there is an interest from within. I cannot force the awakening of this interest, but I can help it somehow, offering opportunities. Master Chang Dsu Yao believed it was important to correct the pupils with words, but most of all with practical examples, giving them the possibility to visualize the master and to observe themselves at the same time without the use of sight, just becoming aware of their own body-sensations. (Fassi, Cuturello, Magni & Tomatis 2012, 41) Since I could not use words, in the beginning I just invited the participants to follow the whole form of T'ai Chi Ch'üan several times, and then we repeated a single movement together several times. With the use of gestures every now and then I underlined some important details. Sometimes I showed the martial application of one movement, in order to help the understanding of the dynamic. In some cases I adjusted a participant's posture by touching her/him. I still felt I was instructing too much from outside, leading the attention of the participants where it was supposed to go, but somehow forcing them to follow my own logic and speed.

Silence and repetition anyway led me naturally and gradually towards a change of attitude, which accidentally helped me to get closer to the original spirit of T'ai Chi Ch'üan: slowness, relaxation, meditation. I began more and more to slow the rate of execution of the form together with my breath-rhythm and I attempted to work as deeply as possible for myself. In the place of detailed explanations on single techniques, I just remained still in one single posture for several minutes, giving time to the participants to feel their own bodies in that posture and to grasp from me all the details they wanted, according to their own interest and attention. This is actually an ancient Chinese practice, the Chan Chuang (站桩, “standing like a post”), extremely useful to accustom the body to a correct execution of the techniques. (Fassi, Cuturello, Magni & Tomatis 2012, 41) Among the participants there were two

pupils of mine, from my ordinary Kung Fu classes: it was interesting to notice how they could learn faster and more precisely by following my silent classes. In particular, they improved the sense of unity, the flow connecting all the steps and figures. Silence, repetition, stillness and slow speed somehow awakened from within their own capacity to watch, memorize and perform, as I could not do previously by means of many words.

4.3. Orazio Costa mimic method

I studied the Orazio Costa mimic method in the Theatre Academy of Italy (Accademia Nazionale D'Arte Drammatica "Silvio D'Amico"). My teachers Alessandra Niccolini and Giuseppe Bevilacqua had been pupils of Orazio Costa. They encouraged us at first to develop a spontaneous approach with the elements of nature, as children naturally do: by touching, smelling, tasting, playing. Then we had to translate the sensorial experience instinctively into movements, which had to be combined with voice and words. We worked with water, earth, grass, trees, fire, air and little by little we shifted towards animals and then we started to perform abstract concepts such as emotions or ideas. We worked finally with theatrical texts, condensing the movements into an internal attitude of the body, making them no longer externally visible, but still affecting the quality of the voice and the presence on the stage.

Orazio Costa Giovangigli (1911-1999), was an Italian director and one of the best exponents of theatrical pedagogy in Europe. Inspired by the teachings of his master Jaques Copeau (1879-1949), he developed a mimic method to train the psycho-physic flexibility in order to help actors to interpret a role. His method is based on a sequence of exercises meant to stimulate the capacity of the actors to empathize with any element of the nature, animate or not.

Even though the method encourages the use of voice in synergy with body

movements, the basic practice of experiencing the natural elements with the five senses is a fundamental training of active silence, which allows us to establish a strong link with our “sylvatic” dimension in order to recover our physical and psychological balance, and also to build a spiritual resonance with the natural world. (Barbiero, Benessia, Bianco, Camino, Ferrando, Freire & Vittori 2007, 46) It is interesting to notice that the spiritual importance of such training is underlined by many masters of T'ai Chi Ch'üan. Here below, for example, are the simple words of master Chang Dsu Yao, as recorded by his pupil master Roberto Fassi:

Improving the sensorial perception is important not only in martial arts but also in meditation and... in everyday life. “Perceiving” means: to become aware.

(Chang Dsu Yao in Fassi, Cuturello, Magni & Tomatis 2012, 33)

In the workshop “Moving the Silence” I proposed the basic work on air, water, earth, stone and fire: I believe this instinctive mimic approach could open new ways in the practice of the T'ai Chi Ch'üan, traditionally rich in symbols related to the natural elements. It is also interesting to notice that exercises of sensorial training with nature are part of many eastern schools of meditation. In particular the tantric tradition has promoted practices surprisingly close to the Costa method, in order to help the practitioner to develop the inner sensitivity necessary to recognize the most subtle processes happening in meditation. (see Osho 2011, 389)

Orazio Costa describes the mimic process in these words:

From “imitating” you will move towards “miming”. From the pure and simple repetition you will move towards a function which is at the same time interpretative and creative. Interpretative because, since it cannot replicate, it translates. Creative because the choice of the expressive acts is not mechanically automatic but it relies on the nature of the individual.

(Costa 1966, Letter to the grand-child Nicola)

The basic procedure in the first classes of Orazio Costa’s method consists in a

very simple exercise, completely free from any technique. The main point is to develop a personal approach with the elements of nature, without following any external example, without copying each other, just by opening the heart to the intuition and body-instinct.

In my teaching strategy, I have elaborated five consecutive phases:

- observe, touch and sense the element
- gradually “transform” the whole body into the essential qualities of that specific element
- increase the magnitude of the movements
- condense the magnitude of the movements
- in stillness, maintain the movement inside the body

I give only three rules:

- maintain every single part of the body alive, treating them as working material without any distinction between their own ordinary different roles
- find infinite constant variations in the movements in terms of dynamics, directions, speed, maintaining alive the essential qualities of the element
- give time to every one of the five phases

I have found that this exercise has been extremely suitable for working in silence. Differently from the T'ai Chi Ch'üan sessions, the mimic moments did not require me myself to be initially a model to be followed: very soon everyone developed a personal method of approaching the elements and making them become alive in their own bodies. The teacher was the element. And when the time came to find contact among the others, the previous individual work became reinforced by the interactions with other “living” elements. Water became more aware of its own fluidity by crushing against a

solid stone, while wood could discover its own peculiar life-power by digging into the earth, and so on.

A remarkable experience was the moment when T'ai Chi Ch'üan and element's mimic began to interact. I could distinguish two possible ways of interaction.

The first modality was a very slight and inner work of maintaining the element's quality alive inside the body, while performing the T'ai Chi Ch'üan form. That happened as a spontaneous consequence, whenever we were practicing the T'ai Chi Ch'üan immediately after a long exploration of an element: after the water-mimic, for example, I become extremely aware of the fluidity connecting the movements of the T'ai Chi Ch'üan form and I felt I could connect one posture to the other much better. After the stone's mimic, my T'ai Chi Ch'üan became remarkably slow and rooted and I could distinguish much better the shifting of the weight from one leg to the other, in particular experiencing a sensation of fullness in the body parts which were more Yang (heavy and strong).

The second way was maybe more performative, since the interaction between the mimic of the element and the form of T'ai Chi Ch'üan became externally visible. The T'ai Chi Ch'üan form was in that case a sort of flexible structure, a modifiable path where the element was running powerfully, sometimes breaking the pattern in order to follow its own instinctive needs of expression and coming back to the rails of the form every now and then in order to canalize its creative energy along the channel of a known movement.

In both cases I felt that the aspects of self-expression and inner awareness were present at the same time: the action was developing along the borderline between performance and meditation.

This topic became crucial when we proceeded towards the performance.

4.4. *Creative interactions*

During the second week of the workshop, Eerika and I shared the leadership with the whole group: everyone had the possibility to suggest an exercise which could offer the ground for creative interactions between the matters we had been studying in the previous days. Even though the interactions already happened as a spontaneous consequence of the parallel practice of each discipline, now we wanted to directly encourage dialogue. Some of those exercises became the starting points of the following performance. The creativity of the group exploded in a variety of stimulating tasks, moving on the border line between performative and meditative improvisations. Each exercise was briefly described on a piece of paper, which we put into a container. Every day we randomly chose one or two of them, and we practiced without limits of time, until we felt the exploration was exhaustive.

Ch'i Kung dance:

- Do the Ch'i Kung breathing technique
- Practise your dance choreography maintaining the concentration on the Ch'i Kung breathing technique

Creation of five elements:

- Divide into groups of 2 or 3. Choose an element
- Feel the element within you and in your group
- Perform the elemental creation: WATER nourishes WOOD feeds FIRE creates EARTH ages into METAL condenses into WATER, ...

T'ai Chi mimic:

- Do the mimic of one element of your choice
- Practise the T'ai Chi, maintaining in your body the quality of your element

Back to back:

- Sit or stand with your partner back to back
- Listen and sense your own and your partner's breathing. Sense the temperature
- Feel the movement that comes from the breath. You may follow if some movement appears. Don't try to lead it, just follow
- Find an ending together

180° scanning:

- You are standing. Turn your head very slowly from left to right side
- Watch and become aware of everything around you
- Imagine how it feels to be the objects you see

Floor, skin, air:

- Lie down on the floor
- Feel your skin touching the floor
- Let your skin open up and breathe in touch with the floor. You can breathe wonderfully lightly through your skin
- Start moving, sensing your open skin on the floor
- Let the movement and the skin lead you to dance freely

T'ai Chi composition:

- Listen to your breath
- Let the breath take you to movement
- Start to add movements from T'ai Chi into your movement
- Gradually add more and more T'ai Chi until you end up doing the whole combination. Try to be in sync with the others

The workshop "Moving the Silence" opened up so many possibilities of interaction between T'ai Chi, meditation and expressive movement, that it

looked like an infinite process. Exploring ever new interactions could widen the research on silence too much in a quantitative way. Maybe the exercises we developed could be the beginning of the construction of a method, or maybe the starting point for new workshops. But I wanted to understand the meaning of our work: since I began to believe that meditation and performative arts are not in conflict, could I not research more deeply in that direction? **When do performance and meditation meet each other and when do they not cooperate any longer? I decided that the boundaries between performance and meditation would be my new research line throughout the construction of the performance.**

5. MOVING THE SILENCE – PERFORMANCE

At the end of the first week of the workshop “Moving the Silence” we planned an open discussion, giving the possibility to all the participants to share their own experiences. I was expecting to hear a lot of questions, doubts or some frustration but I discovered that we were all remarkably attuned, there were no questions, just peace and the desire to continue. The silence had somehow helped everyone to find a personal inner motivation and answers to many questions. Many participants experienced a change in their own lives, a shift towards a deeper inner calmness, a need for silence. Many beginners in meditation had conquered the initial difficulties in the morning silent meditation without the need for any external help: time, silence and repetition day by day had awakened their own inner source of determination and peace.

At the end of the two week-workshop, the participants shared that the working atmosphere was free of any form of oppressive power: they felt free to be themselves and to research in peace and concentration.

Some external students of TeaK began to join our morning meditations every now and then (we decided to open them to the whole school) and they observed that the room was full of peace and creative energy and that the free silent meditation was already an interesting performance, where everyone was extremely focused even though we were practising different techniques at the same time.

5.1. Rehearsals

Immediately after the two weeks of workshop, we started to rehearse the performance with those participants who wished to continue the experience of

silence with us. Five of them joined in: Tanja Eloranta, Harri Rantala, Jyri Sucksdorff, Joni Valtonen and Katerina Zherbina. We maintained the shape of “artistic-spiritual retreat” and we further developed the material of the workshop, rehearsing five hours a day, in silence, with the possibility to share some feedbacks verbally during the last hour of Fridays. All the other days, we ended with periods of silent sharing.

The central question of our work focused on the exploration of the boundaries between meditation and performance.

During the first rehearsal-week Eerika and I stepped back into the role of teachers, in order to introduce some new topics such as the mimic of the animals and new movement patterns. Then we re-opened to a creative process, asking the participants to contribute with their own ideas, proposing directions of work.

Rev. Henri visited our rehearsals every now and then, and we decided that his role in the performance would be to introduce the audience into the space giving them some tools to enter at once into a meditative attitude. He would then be in charge of making an Ikebana-composition during the event.

A new entry in the production was Tero Kaunisvuo, the musician who was to “play the silence”. He had already participated in some of our meditation sessions and he had already been a practitioner of Buddhist mantra-meditation himself for many years: he embraced our project with enthusiasm and artistic sensitivity. He came once a week to try out some delicate sounds to be carefully used on the main soundtrack of the silence.

We had as yet no idea of what the performance would look like. We decided not to fix any definitive structure yet, but to try out many possibilities, sharing the responsibility with the whole group. I proposed the first structure, the following day was Eerika’s turn, then Joni, one of the participants, wrote the

third structure for the next day. But already at the end of Eerika's experiment, before Joni could present his own structure to the group, Eerika and I felt that our work was running too far from the topics we had been working on in the previous weeks: as in the second week of the workshop, the risk was again to work on the surface inventing infinite new possibilities. We realized that the group was starting to feel lost: it was difficult to maintain a meditative attitude while rehearsing a new performance every day and we all began to "show". We decided to define a precise structure containing the main topics we had been working on, in order to make the whole group feel safe in a more canalized direction.

Before Joni could propose his own structure, Eerika and I announced our decision: we broke the silence saying that, after Joni's structure, we would not have worked with other new propositions, since we wanted to create a basic structure which could allow the group to work deeper and deeper, without wasting our energies in searching for new creative directions, relying on the evidence that we had already plenty of material to deal with.

We said so before Joni's turn, in order to avoid him believing that our change of direction was determined by his own "bad" work. As he shared later, he felt that we announced the news at the wrong moment, since his own task was diminished of its own potential. But, most of all, we felt that we had reacted moved by the fear of being lost and we stepped back, avoiding the other participants thinking of and offering other possible structures. Anyway it was still true that we had not time enough to allow the creative explorations to dissipate our energies in any direction.

Christmas time gave us a pause to rethink our strategy.

After the Christmas holidays we re-opened the possibility to modify the basic structure, trying at the same time not to go too far from the main direction. The group suggested some variations, working more and more on little details,

until we could define the exact sequence of the event.

One peculiarity of the event was to be that every evening we would exchange our roles, in order not to develop preferences. Before each performance we would practise one hour of meditation and the performance would start immediately after, with ten minutes more of meditation together with the audience. The audience would be free to choose whether to continue to meditate for the whole event or watch the performance.

5.2. Master silence

There is silence, a silence which is not an absence of sound but which is the object of a positive sensation, more positive than that of sound. Noises, if there are any, only reach me after crossing this silence.

(Weil 1951, 71)

More and more seldom, during our rehearsals I still sometimes broke the silence with a few words in order to introduce some new concept. I began to feel guilty at ruining such a holy space and soon Eerika and I started to write any instructions on a piece of paper, realizing often that the words we were going to say were not necessary at all, and sharing the paper with the group only in the rare case that it was really needed.

The working atmosphere became definitively so open that everybody was trained to accept any interruption or accident as a natural component of the silence: the flow of concentration and awareness was less and less disturbed even when people came late or some observer came to visit the rehearsals. Silence had trained us to develop a meditative attitude throughout our meetings. Even breaks and lunch-pauses were part of the meditation. Even the sounds of the school's students shouting in the corridor or in the other

rooms were welcomed with love. The apex of environmental disturbances happened one day when we had to rehearse close to a room where another group was rehearsing a performance with disco-music. The speakers were against our wall and we started the one-hour meditation with this very loud soundtrack. I felt that was a limit-situation: the whole meditation and the following run through could easily be ruined if we could not focus. But nobody opened their eyes, nobody moved, we started to accept the vibrations of the speakers on the floor as part of our meditation. After one hour we were extremely focused. Eerika arrived late with her two-year-old son: the little boy began to run curiously around us and to interact with the performance. I felt that he also was part of the event and we all could work happily and relaxed: silence was inside of us!

Silence became more and more the only facilitator, we were all teachers, pupils and matter at the same time of a process of self-knowledge and group-sharing.

With me silence worked as a microscope, pointing out without mercy any nuance of tendency to control the process. My struggle against my ego went more and more deeply. Even though we could not talk, the communication among the group began to work on an intuitional level. I began to notice how my own reactions were affecting the others and how my worries and expectations were still alive in me and coming out through my eyes, postures and gestures. An interesting accident happened some weeks before our première, one Saturday that Eerika could not come to the rehearsals.

We had elaborated a new little variation on the basic structure to be tried out. I gave the paper with the new instructions to the group and, after they read it, we did a run through: one hour of meditation plus one hour of performance, following the new rules. Joni had to gently approach another performer of his choice during an exercise of weight-shifting. The other performer would have to mime the fire and then affect the whole group. Unfortunately the other

performer did not understand the new rule and nobody started to mime the fire. Finally I solved the situation miming the fire myself and the run through arrived successfully to its end. Later on, I found interesting the tension caused by such misunderstandings and I have learnt to accept those accidents as privileged opportunities for waiting and listening. But in that situation I was mostly worried that the group did not interpret the instructions correctly. So, after our run through, I used our moment of silent sharing to show on the paper, with a simple gesture, the point of the basic structure where the accident had happened and I made the sign to rehearse the same part again after the lunch break. Here is the description of my educational mistake, in the words of Joni:

On Saturday 19th of January I was taking part in the Moving the Silence-rehearsals at Teak. There was a new structure to the performance and it was a bit more complicated than before. Everybody was supposed to study the structure beforehand and keep in mind the structure: the length of each particular element and the right order of elements. All went well until the so-called gentle contact impro which I rushed into. Besides that, the person I was in contact with didn't stay in weight shifting position as it was planned. And even more he didn't mime the fire as he was supposed to do. That led to totally unplanned fire improvisation among all the participants. At the end of the performance there was a sense of failure to be explored. The hands-on decision by the pedagogical leader was to point the mistakes and encourage us all to try the failed part again. He did that quite in a neutral way. But as it is we are all humans there can be a day when just a little notion of failure can lead to a big disappointment. I was feeling very fragile that day and after the first run through during the lunch break I was seriously wondering whether I can give it a better shot anymore.

(Joni, performer in "Moving the Silence")

As soon as I was pointing at the paper where the basic structure of the performance was written, I felt that I was hurting the sensitivity of my group. I wanted to indicate the part of the structure which had been misunderstood, worried that the others did not understand it correctly, and I suggested with a gesture to try that part again after the lunch break. I realized immediately that I was again trying to control the process, pointing out mistakes in order to make it improve according to my plans. But it was too late: in silence a single little gesture is as powerful as an earth tremor. I felt I had cut the enthusiasm of the group, diminishing the two hours of work that they marvelously did just before. Was it not a success in the end that the group could face and solve in real time the accidents in the rehearsal, following their intuitions? Was it a

real problem if someone did not exactly understand what was written on the paper? In the very end, was it not clear that the real value of our work did not rely on what we were supposed to do, but in how we were doing it? The silent lunch-pause worked as a healer: I had time to deal with the discomfort caused by my pedagogical mistake and I realized that there was a way out, in order to give back freedom and possibly re-awaken the joy of my fellows: accepting my mistake, forgiving myself and giving back the responsibility of the command to the whole group. I wrote on the top of a paper: “how do you feel today?”. And below, I gave four options: rehearsing the part of the fire-impro, making a new run through of the whole basic structure, having a T'ai Chi Ch'üan session or having a relaxing massage-session in pairs. The group voted unanimously for the run through. I saw them smiling again.

But during the lunch break I had a sense of the pedagogical leader wondering whether he was a little too harsh on us. Before the second run through he handed us four different options to continue. And above the options was written "How are you feeling today?" That was a big relief for me to have options to choose from. It wasn't this feeling that we failed and the leader really just wants to make it happen in a certain way. It felt like it was totally a performance influenced by us all equally again. And it felt good! And the question about how we are feeling made me feel less anxious or afraid of the outcome. There was this feeling of freedom and acceptance which made the second run through a success. At least that was my feeling about it. I really wanted to give it a try because I was not told to do so but there was a possibility of doing it. I just feel that the difference between teacher and facilitator might lie here in not having the authority but more showing the way(s) to go. The facilitator is also interested in creating the right atmosphere for everyone to flourish.

(Joni, performer in “Moving the Silence”)

I began to trust silence as the closest of my friends, as a master whispering wise suggestions: the solution always came out of us whenever we opened our attention with faith. As the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire (1921-1997) wrote, faith is “*an a priori requirement for dialogue*” (Freire 2006, 90), together with love, humility and, as a natural consequence, trust. (Freire 2006, 91) By means of an increasing feeling of faith in the pedagogical potential of silence, an intense dialogical process started to happen inside and among us, facilitating a working atmosphere of mutual trust.

Silence taught us the power of waiting: waiting in stillness, waiting by going on with the same task for a long period, patiently working through the initial

sense of boredom, frustration or exhaustion, repeating the same exercises for many days, without remarkable changes, working through a feeling of being lost or wasting energies in wrong directions, accepting mistakes and failures as temporary and relative components of a process whose destiny cannot be other than success.

5.3. Basic structure

The basic structure of the performance included long moments of stillness and silent meditation, mimic explorations of air, water, earth and stone, an exercise of movement based on a mental visualization of a tree, weight shifting combined with a Ch'i Kung breathing technique, T'ai Chi Ch'üan and mimic interaction, a mimic improvisation with the fire element which could break the serious and slow flow, a final form of T'ai Chi Ch'üan all together.

Throughout this, an Ikebana composition would be created by Rev. Henri and our guest friend Gesa Piper would be meditating in the lotus posture for the whole event.

The space would be flat, with no separation between performers and audience, the sitting places would be meditation cushions arranged in two concentric ellipses; in the center, a wide empty space for the main actions.

The following list contains the final instructions of our basic structure, developed in silence within three months of rehearsals.

- *Meditation*: 60 minutes before the performance plus ten minutes with the audience.
- *Tree impro*: when the meditation time is ended, two performers will take their own time to be clear about the feeling coming from the image

of a tree. Without any rush, when they feel ready, they will start the movement in super-slowness, moving at first only one single part of the body (hand, finger,...) and little by little involving the rest of the body. Trees grow slowly. Let's give every spectator a chance to see where the movement develops from. The individual work is even more important than the following work in pairs: the time for the individual tree-impro could be longer, while the contact with the partner may last a bit less: it is just the tip of the iceberg. When the meditation time is ended all the other performers are free to watch the tree-impro and to have eye contact with the audience. But let's try never to relax our meditative attitude. One possible suggestion could be to keep the focus on the area of our heart and from there mentally spread love towards the audience and our group.

- *Mimic*: when the tree-performers touch each other, the rest of the group will still wait in stillness for one minute in order to respect the encounter. Then they will take the blankets from their own shoulders at the same time, open their legs, take the bowl containing their own element as working men do daily. Until that moment, some possible eye contact with the audience is still welcome. But then our focus will go on the elements and the sensations emerging. The mimic could start extremely slowly. Be faithful to your element. When the two tree-performers become still, the rest of the group will explode into a very expanded mimic. They will finally end together going to stillness.
- *Weight shifting*: after a good period of stillness, the whole group will start a very small weight shifting, focusing on the Ch'i kung breathing technique.
- *Gentle encountering solo*: after a good period of stillness, one performer will join another one and will find a gentle way to be in contact-attunement with that person. Very little is enough, one or two things. Do not act but follow your intuition.
- *T'ai Chi Ch'üan mimic*: the group will practise the T'ai Chi Ch'üan form, each playing with the quality of her/his own element.
- *Fire*: the one performer who has been reached during the gentle encountering solo will continue the weight shifting and at a certain moment will begin the mimic of the fire, moving around the others. When the fire spreads among us, let it influence the rhythm of your

moving. Open yourself to others, audience included, dare to see and to be seen. Be yourself in the movement.

- *T'ai Chi Ch'üan*: after the fire, we will walk at normal speed and suddenly we will practise the T'ai Chi Ch'üan form in sync, as slow as possible.

5.4. How can meditation be a performance?

If it is right to advertise chewing gum, it is better to advertise real wisdom and thoughts which people can chew mentally, and assimilate for their highest spiritual nourishment.

(Yogananda 1982)

One day close to the première, I took the decision to step out of the rehearsals together with Eerika a few minutes before the run through, in order to help the group not to rely on us, and to make the performance become their own meditative practice. For the first time in over three months I opened my eyes during the meditation. I saw the enchanting image of six persons perfectly still, with eyes closed in an attitude of concentration and ecstatic calmness. It was beautiful. Magic. My mind went back to the first day of our workshop in November, how worried I was: could they stand one hour of meditation? Among them, there were some who had never meditated before: how could they manage such a rigid discipline every morning from November till February? And now, here they are: a group of yogi-performers!

Beyond the surprise and my enthusiasm, I started to question was it correct to let the meditation be part of the performance; could it not be interpreted as an act of "showing" what good meditators we are? That would mean to ruin the spirit of meditation. This question forced me to go back to my primary motivation. What was the reason for all this work? Why did I start to research silence? Why did I want to make a performance of it?

As a pedagogue of art, I have felt in the last years the responsibility to help my pupils to explore and develop their own inner motivation. One of the main temptations of the impulsive type is to escape such questions: why am I seeking to become a professional in this field? What could my art give to me and what can I give to the world through my art? What is the highest goal I can reach through my discipline? I have observed that professional improvement does not necessarily correspond to improvement in human qualities and I believe that growing as an artist should go together with becoming a better person.

Now it was time to search for an answer for myself.

I began to reflect at which point I was. Why did I want to mix meditation and performance? Was I mature enough to put myself as a meditator in the performance? How could I analyze myself?

I found help in an ancient Indian theory about the progressive steps for the spiritualization of the inner motivations moving human beings in life: the same theory that, misunderstood in the course of the ages, produced the rigid and inhuman system of the castes in Indian society. (Kriyananda 2007) These were the questions I asked myself, by means of my personal and questionable reinterpretation of that old scheme.

The sensual motivation: I am the goal. How much was I willing to perform meditation moved by the motor of my own narcissism? How much do I depend on others' opinions? In order to go beyond such a dependence, I usually point out, as a teacher, that a better self-discipline will lead towards a stronger self-esteem. I encourage actions which could project "outwards" the ego-centered and "inwards"-directed attitude of the "sensual" motivation: creating a stimulating artistic project, for example, may awaken the curiosity for research and may stimulate the cooperation with other possible partners. Even though the whole process was already oriented towards research and

empowerment of self-discipline, could not I find in me any seed of sensual motivation?

The active motivation: art is the goal. To what extent was I looking for personal profit? Am I looking for selfish success or power? Am I looking for people who could share my path? Am I living for my art, identifying myself as an artist and feeling somehow “different” from the rest of the world? I would need in this case to rediscover links between my own art and the everyday life, in order to become aware of the “*events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of man, arousing his interest and affording him enjoyment as he looks and listens*” (Dewey 1980, 4-5): wonder, humbleness and respect are positive attitudes balancing the passionate temperament generated by an “active” motivation. How could I remain humble but enthusiastic at the same time? Was I not proud of my work? Was I emotionally too attached to it?

The warrior motivation: art is the means. Do I perceive art as a mirror of life? Am I using it to discover and fight against personal limits and to grow as a human being among other human beings? Is art for me a means of Self-realization?

The spiritual motivation: I am the means. Could I say that I, meditation and art are one? Is art for me an instrument of inspiration and love? Do I want to give myself to the world and life without any egoistic expectation? This could be the motivation of a genuine master, who has intimately realized that there is no difference between the artistic moment and the everyday life, since life is the supreme art: that is, maybe, the sole motor behind the concept of “artless” art mentioned in the Zen tradition. (Herrigel 2004, 30)

I actually could find in me components of all the first three motivations in varying amounts, in particular the third one: I felt it described quite well the phase of the process in which I was mostly. I recognized in me both egoistic

and unselfish motivations, according to the thoughts I allowed to develop out of fear or love. They were often mixed together.

Sometimes I make and teach art in order to have partners in my search for fulfilment and happiness. I have a fear of being alone and I feel encouraged when I can share my path with someone else. In other moments I have the urge to transmit the human knowledge that I am carrying in me. As an artist-pedagogue, I perceive myself as the link between the past tradition and the new generations. In other situations I am striving to help my pupils or my audience to discover their own inner creative sources: I want them to become opened, free, aware. But my strongest motivation is the joy of searching. Expanding the artistic and human potential of my students or inspiring my audience offering them an opportunity to mature a true meditative experience is a way to open them, and me with them, to a deeper perception of the reality.

The fourth motivation was somehow still potential: I would like to say that I am moved by pure love and that I am moved by my mature realization of cosmic unity, but that is at the moment my potential goal. Hopefully I am on my way.

But was not the direction of our efforts in the end more important than our actual results? It was not my intention to “show” or to “entertain” anyone. If performance means to “entertain”, certainly that is not the place for the practice of “active” silence. But is performance only that? Could it not be for example an opportunity for “sharing” an experience?

If my experience with silence had been so intense and transforming, why should I not wish to share it with other people? I could not avoid some member of our audience condemning the presence of meditation as an act of exhibitionism or as a boring provocation. I could not even guarantee that my own narcissism would already be completely vanishing, but was it so fundamental to be perfect? I think that meditation should not be confused

with its own goal. We were not pretending to be enlightened saints, offering ecstatic experiences to the audience: we would just be there meditating, as human beings in front of other human beings and maybe, why not, together with them.

5.5. How can a performance be meditation?

In your silence, God's silence ceases.

(Yogananda 2004, 49)

The last run through before the première was open to the audience. For the first time there was a huge number of spectators and I felt I could not maintain my own attention focused on the inner processes of the meditation throughout the performance. When the audience came in, after the first hour of meditation, my heart began to beat faster and a part of me was “recording” all the reactions of the people around me. It was a struggle. Fortunately, the structure of the event was so meditation-oriented as to recall my attention back to my inner work many and many times. At the end of the run through I felt tired and I could recognise the same kind of doubts on the faces of my fellows: could it be that it is impossible to meditate, in the presence of spectators? Cannot we definitively learn not to be afraid of others' judgements or dependent on others' expectations?

Then we looked at the audience. Some of them did not move from their sitting places and remained with their eyes closed. One woman had tears in her eyes: she shared later that she felt a healing process happening in herself during the performance and some deep trouble of hers melted into peace: this was the first of a long series of similar sharings that we have collected after each

performance. Here below is a short quotation from an article published on the web, talking about our performance, which describes the process from the point of view of one spectator.

But is there a place for judgment, estimation, or interpretation when the meditation is brought to the stage? And how does the spectator's experience change if he stays non-judging, non-estimating and non-interpreting?

The brightly lighted lotus-ikebana is truly captivating. The performance is over now and I have none inner impulse to leave this space but a strong one to stay witnessing. Still body, non-judging mind. I recognize my kinesthetic response to this space – space full of silence.

(Prokhorova 2013, article on Moving the Silence: www.liikekieli.com)

We realized that the audience was not actually looking at us: many people were witnessing our actions, dealing with their own inner processes, as well as we were doing. I felt a big relief: we were not responsible for the success of the meditation of the audience; we had to leave it in the hands of the spectators.



Moving the Silence, photo: Miso Macura.
In the picture, from the left: Katerina Zherbina and Harri Rantala.

The day of the première I no longer had anxiety. When the audience came in, I was so focused in my meditation that I did not experience any remarkable

change in my inner peaceful attitude. The sole variation was that it felt easy to spread my love all around me, towards our “guests”.

Of course, I cannot force myself to love, if I intend love merely as an emotion. But love is not just feeling, it requires will. Love is an inner attitude which may be trained in order to become a stable habit, it is “*an act of courage*” (Freire 2006, 89), as the great Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire (1921-1997) wrote, and “*commitment to the others*” (Freire 2006, 89): in the case of our performance, that meant for me to welcome the audience in the silence of my heart, in an attitude of acceptance of every single spectator as a special person, taking the risk and the commitment towards them to be just myself, without acting for the whole duration of the event, remaining faithful to my tasks. An inner silent dialogue between me and the others aroused without use of any mental word, in the simple terms of being present with them, sharing same silent space. As Freire said: “*love is at the same time foundation of the dialogue and dialogue itself*”. (Freire 2006, 89)

I started to enjoy the new situation of shared silence. Day by day, I could deepen the interaction between my creative expressivity and meditation, maintaining my attention focused on my inner processes and letting the movements happen freely.

Some feedbacks from the audience underlined the importance of such events in contemporary society, describing the performance as a beautiful and “holy” space where people could just be, free from any definition. Even though in the “Moving the Silence”-performance we put on the stage our own specific spiritual practices, the artistic event was free from any religious connotation. Differently from churches, synagogues or meditation centres of several traditions, our space was not selecting people in terms of beliefs and religion, since it was a place for art, but still it maintained a declared meditative purpose.

The renowned Catholic theologian Romano Guardini (1885-1968) defines a “holy” place as “*a space denied to any profane use and consecrated to the religious cult*” (Guardini 2005, 54): Guardini wrote that “*a place becomes holy just if God consecrates it, and that happens when God enters into it*” (Guardini 2005, 54), reminding the reader that of course Christians believe that God is omnipresent, but there are places where God is present in a “*new and particular way*”, which are “*separated from the purposes of everyday life*” (Guardini 2005, 55).

I think that the stage of our performance became “holy”, in the extent that it opened us to an honest attitude of introspection, to the wonder of witnessing, and to the “religious cult” of worshiping the presence of the “God within us”: our own deep essence. For example, many spectators shared that they had an opportunity to reflect about their own inner silence or about the place that silence had in their own life. Some others could face their own automatic pattern to judge and could train the counterbalancing attitude of witnessing. The most recurrent words were:

- Being
- Beauty/beautiful
- Peace/calmness
- Holy
- Inner silence

The structure of the event proved to be rich in symbols, which I could not even imagine before. For example, the two polarities Yin and Yang came out from the presence of Rev. Henri and Gesa, disposed on the two opposite sides of the room: one man working with water, scissors and flowers and a woman meditating with her eyes closed, in perfect stillness. Action and peace, daily life and spiritual search: they were harmonically mirroring each other.

Entering the space, some people felt that we were isolated, separate beings in the same place, and the whole performance was a slow process of mutual attunement until we could move in sync performing the T'ai Chi Ch'üan: the ending represented our perfect attunement, transforming our own individual meditation into a shared meditation. Other spectators could discover uplifting messages of hope, recalling human beings to their own noblest ideals. The following quotation is another fascinating interpretation in the words of a spectator.

Beautiful and strong, also a holy experience. It made me think of all the monasteries, meditation places, temples, people who meditate together or alone as a net of silent oases around the world that actually keep this crazy world together and prevent it from falling apart.

(Katja, spectator)



Moving the Silence, photo: Miso Macura.

In the picture, from the left: Joni Valtonen, Katerina Zherbina, Eerika Arposalo and Jyri Sucksdorff.

Personally, during the performances I experienced the same kind of challenges that I face in meditation, such as restless thoughts and emotions

coming and going, and the same processes/effects, such as concentration, expansion of a sense of inner peace, awareness, vitality. The slow rhythm of the performance and the silent atmosphere allowed us to spend a long time in each phase of the structure for waiting and listening. In many occasions I had the feeling that things were happening by themselves just at the right moment and surprisingly they were different every time.

The performance resonated in tune with the different backgrounds of the spectators, allowing them to grasp new meanings and links with their own professional or spiritual interests. Some of them were glad to have the challenging opportunity not to analyze, but just to be there. Some others spontaneously wanted to write their own feedbacks and in many cases I had the impression of reading the descriptions of many different performances. For example, here below I quote two feedbacks, describing the performance.

The first one is clearly reflecting the professional-dancer background of the spectator.

Gradually and slowly like a flower blossom two of the performers move out of the blankets. Eyes closed, movements abstract and formless still not chaotic. The two happen to meet each other and remarkably the duet does not get captured into a movement flow common to contact improvisation technique. It simply keeps the two aware and curious about each other.

As gradual and slow other performers come out of still meditation. And after a while with all my knowledge and experience in Authentic Movement, an expressive improvisational movement practice, I find myself witnessing its session happening as a performance. I witness the participants sensing their inner body-mind processes, recognizing their intuitive impulses and following them expressing movement. Nothing is directed nor predicted to them. And as an essential part of Authentic Movement practices the movers are passively observed – observed by us, the audience of the performance.

(Prokhorova 2013, article on Moving the Silence: www.liikekieli.com)

The second feedback has been written by a spectator with Christian religious background.

I heard the murmur of the water. The meditator sitting close to me seemed to be rinsing his hands in the bowl in front of him, dropped his cloak and began to open himself. I do not know if he was washing away some stain from his past but as he rose up gently he was more and more light and was moving with firm and light steps, with ability and control, raising his arms and legs. In the end all the meditators had risen up and were moving alone, without looking at each other. I thought they were together but alone. It made me sad.

When all the meditators had “opened up from their shells” and had danced, each on his own place, now light without their own burden, the dance became happier and they danced in a circle, together, happier and happier. They smiled at each other mildly and looked happy together and their faces were shining. “Alone together” became “all together”. Only one meditator sat during the whole performance still on her place with a calm face. Maybe the cup of her prayers had not yet been filled enough for the purification.

(Liisi, spectator)

I suppose that this variety of interpretations has been possible because of the simplicity of the structure of our performance. While building the sequence of our actions, we attempted to apply the basic principle of the Ikebana, the Japanese art of arranging flowers: taking away all the unnecessary and keeping only the few elements which gave harmony. We attempted to never push the action and we tried to let it happen, listening to the same silence together with the audience. The ten minutes of silent meditation with the audience, in the beginning, and the long period of standing meditation during the weight shifting, in the halfway through the performance, were in this sense very important moments to restore our capacity of listening. There were no sounds, no entertaining movements. We took the risk to break the rhythm generated by the flow of the movements. But we never interrupted the inner flow of meditation. I believe that especially these two moments allowed our performance to become a meditation: both the performers and the audience had the opportunity to go back into themselves. As performers, I think we have been able to use those periods to root ourselves in meditation, and to maintain a meditative attitude during the phases of movement. In other words, I believe that our performance could become a meditation because we were not performing meditation, but we were meditating while performing. The performance was like a ritual, a prayer without words. It did not matter

how deep our group or the audience members could arrive in meditating. Some days it felt easier to concentrate, on other days it required more efforts, but, as the Christian Orthodox tradition teaches:

When we pray, there is at that moment nothing to distinguish us from the saints.

(*Racconti di un Pellegrino Russo* 2000, 221)

6. SILENT PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES

The delicate passages from the first to the second week of the “Moving the Silence”-workshop and then from the workshop to the rehearsals of the performance represented for me and Eerika the gradual shift from the role of teacher to the role of facilitator. As a teacher, I found myself working both as an instructor and as an educator. As a facilitator, I began by actively offering opportunities to our group for developing experiences and I ended up passively tasting the experiences of our work as a group, my role as a facilitator having vanished in the process.

In this chapter I will report some reflections about my pedagogical approaches during the process of the workshop and of the rehearsals of the “Moving the Silence”-performance. Many of these concepts have been familiar topics to me throughout the two years of pedagogical studies in the Theatre Academy of Helsinki (Teak). Working in silence has helped me to attain a sense of order, comparing the contemporary theories of pedagogy with my own spiritual needs and background. In silence, every gesture and inner impulse were magnified, allowing me to become aware even of the smallest pattern rooted in me: as a consequence of this process of self-analysis, as a pedagogue, I could recognize the main characteristics of my own style.

6.1. Teaching

The presence of T'ai Chi Ch'üan and Orazio Costa's mimic method in the same workshop made me become aware that I change teaching approach according to the matter I am dealing with. Silence magnified this process since I could not smoothly pass from one discipline to the other accompanying the participants by means of intellectual arguments to connect the two practices

together. Silence made it clear that, as a teacher, I was in the challenging position of covering the roles of both instructor and educator, shifting alternately from one extreme to the other. In the case of the T'ai Chi Ch'üan, I had to transmit my skills and knowledge “externally” to my pupils by means of my example (*to instruct*, from the Latin *in-struere*: to build, to shape, and also to inform). In the case of the mimic method my task was to facilitate a process of awakening of their own creative and original sources, from the “inside” (*to educate*, from the Latin *ex-ducere*: to lead out). Here I found a clear parallel with the pedagogical definitions of “executive” and “therapeutic” approaches to teaching: I am an “executive” teacher when my work is finalized to the transmission of a specific skill to the pupil; I have a “therapeutic” approach whenever I encourage the pupil’s self-expression. (Fenstermacher & Soltis 2004, 1-4)

This has been a great opportunity to reflect about the different purposes of methods in the pedagogy of art, and to reason about the distinction between techniques and methods.

The techniques are, in my opinion, exercises directed to the development of the “athletic” potential of the artist. In order to build an efficient channel to vehicle the creative energy, the artist needs a daily discipline: all those exercises expanding and strengthening the performative possibilities of the artist’s instrument, such as body and voice training for actors or basic postures and steps in martial arts, belong to my idea of “technique”. In this case, the goal of my teaching is a precise result, to be conquered step by step: it takes time to learn a correct posture or a breathing technique and then to transform it into a rooted habit.

The path that I walk in order to learn a technique is what I define as an “instructive” method.

Methods finalized to the mere learning of a technique require a behaviouristic

approach: there is right and wrong, even though they are relative to the level of each pupil, and technique itself is a behaviour to be acquired (Phillips & Soltis 2004). According to the theory of the specific functions of the two sides of the brain, I would say that learning a technique is an operation mainly led by the left side of the brain, since it requires, especially at the beginning, rational understanding, conscious control, focused concentration (Edwards 2011, 60). I often compare the training technique to the first step in Zen archery: the simple action of grasping the bow. (Herrigel 2004) The pupils learn how to handle their own instruments. In the case of a performer, the first focus of awareness will be her/his own individual expressive tool: the ensemble body-voice. It is interesting to notice the parallel with the first level of ability to be attained in the practice of the T'ai Chi Ch'üan. The Taoist philosophy names it “Ching”, the “external ability” level: when, after a long training, the technical level is good, the structure is ready (Chang & Fassi 2008, 34). Nevertheless, a technical execution is not enough. Feelings, emotions and creative energy are not yet running freely.

But methods may have even wider purposes than the mere training of techniques: in those cases techniques, if there are any, are functional to the purpose of the method. Such methods are not “instructive”, rather I would define them as “educative”.

“Educative” methods are paths composed of ordered steps meant to stimulate the “creative” potential of the artist. Whenever I help my pupils to discover and liberate their own creative energy, my approach is constructivist: I leave space to the pupils for personal choices and reflections. (Phillips & Soltis 2004) I usually offer a structure of action and I leave the artist free to work and explore. There is no right or wrong, even though I could identify a positive goal: the conquest of a state of freedom, joy and openness. An “educative” method relies on the thought that we have solutions inside of us: we all have an inner source of energy ready to be discovered and opened. I think that in this case the learning process is mainly led by the right side of the brain, since

the rational mind has to be left apart throughout the exercitations: imagination and intuition, together with the emotions, especially at the beginning need to work in the absence of intellectual judgments (Edwards 2011). The main skills that I am training with these methods are awareness, listening, opened attention and free expressivity. In Zen archery this could be the step of throwing the arrow (Herrigel 2004): the artist's expressivity may be projected outwards because the connection with her/his own inner reality has become stronger and operates as a source of power. Attention is not focused in coordination-control aspects as in the technique-training, but it is peacefully witnessing the changes of feelings and moods, allowing them to come out spontaneously. The artist may feel relaxed independently by the speed or intensity of the action, with an enjoyable sensation of freedom. In T'ai Chi Ch'üan practice this is named "Ch'i" step, the level of "internal energy", strictly related to the liberation of the energy of breathing (Chang & Fassi 2008, 34).

Our experience with silence reinforced my belief in a balanced cooperation between "instructive" and "educative" methods, stimulating a prolific interaction between left and right brain faculties. In music, for example, the left side of the brain takes care of rhythm and notes, while the right side works on the interpretation and expressivity (Edwards 2011, 23). It is necessary to build an effective channel in order to vehicle the creative energy. But I should never forget to leave my pupils free to discover and expand their imaginative potential in parallel with a work of discipline. The limits of a technical training is to produce a perfect, skilled but cold artist, while a too free impro-based training will liberate the inner passion of the artist at the cost of a considerable waste of uncontrolled energy, weakening the power of the performance.

Already at the end of the first week of the "Moving the Silence"-workshop, T'ai Chi Ch'üan and mimic method arrived at the point where they could spontaneously interact, helping each other: the qualities of the elements

explored with mimic became a glue allowing the T'ai Chi Ch'üan to be fluid, personal and full of creative energy; on the other hand the structure of the T'ai Chi Ch'üan form was working as a rail giving a powerful direction to the movements without uncontrolled dissipation of energy.

6.2. Facilitating

The moment arrived, when Eerika and I had to take the risk to stop teaching, in order to let the group stand on their own two feet. We became facilitators: our task was now just to take care of the working atmosphere, making the group feel safe and free to explore. We were offering wide structures to help the research to develop into a creative and meditative flow, being careful not to impose any pre-selected goal. The group surprised us with an energetic response: in many moments of the rehearsals I had the impression that the process was completely out of our hands and it was expanding by itself. The whole group jumped into the unknown, beyond all the tools we had built previously. At this moment it became clear to me that art is not the mere product of methods and techniques. We all just began to listen to each other, letting our explorations happen on the rhythm of the silence. We had to create and recreate new paths, according to our sensitivity and interests, being rooted in the present moment. Art became intuition. Maybe, this could be compared to the third step in Zen archery, hitting the target: the performer learns to adapt every single moment of her/his action to the infinitively various changes in the surrounding environment. Her/his own body vibrates of power on the stage, even when she/he is not moving a single muscle. Taoist philosophy names this “Shen”: the “spiritual and mental energy” level, characterized in particular by an increase of “brightness” in the eyes of the artist (Chang & Fassi 2008, 68).

Eastern philosophies actually also mention a fourth step: the “emptiness” or “egolessness”, named in Chinese “Hsü” (Chang & Fassi, 73). Every now and then during the performance, it has happened that someone of us felt that she/he was no longer moving, but somehow she/he was “moved” by the movement. In Italy (and maybe in other countries too) there is a suggestive expression to define this phenomenon: we say that the performer is “in a state of grace”. As in sports the athletes may experience moments of performative “apex”, the same may happen in arts and in meditation as well. Unfortunately those moments are not under the control of the artist: they happen by accident. But I think that they may increase proportionally with the dedication of the artist in her/his own field. It is my conviction that these unexpected experiences have been facilitated by our daily practice of active silence.

My role as a facilitator vanished in silence. I felt an increasing sense of unity with my group, and later with the audience: a sort of common empathic attunement due to the mutual sharing of an experience which was at the same time personal and collective. I reflected that a true experience is not the quantity of things I have done or tried, but the intensity of the awareness I have applied to an action, no matter if it involves the body or just the mind. A true experience implies the search for a meaning and it increases our capacity to love (Giussani 2005, 126-127).

Silence itself proved to be a platform suitable for generating true experiences, since it helped us to develop our capacity to listen first of all to ourselves. As a second step, I felt that this attitude of objective observation without pre-judgments gave me more clearness to judge the events of my life fairly in their own real value, without making absolutes of them, relating them to my “inner silence”: my own source of balance and wisdom.

If in the modern age the main qualities of a pedagogue were professional preparation, expository skill and intelligence (Doll 1993), I could identify for myself a new goal, which I consider a peculiar need of this post-modern age:

wisdom. Wisdom is in my opinion the skill to distinguish the good from the evil or, in a more post-modern perspective, the capacity to recognize uplifting directions and to avoid the degrading ones in order to become better persons, rather than exclusively efficient professionals. I think wisdom does not rely on the personal talent or intelligence: it is related to the faculty of intuition, which is the fruit of a meditative attitude towards life experiences. The practice of “active” silence may be a privileged soil for cultivating wisdom and intuition, since it is a marvellous starting point for a free, non-dogmatic, creative spiritual search.

I quote below a thought of Swami Kriyananda (1926-), direct disciple of Paramahansa Yogananda and founder of the Living Wisdom Schools, about the need for wisdom in contemporary pedagogy and the problematic related to the promotion of this quality as an essential component in the ordinary scholastic system.

If wisdom were appreciated, many more teachers would attempt to achieve it; the obstacle to its attainment is that wisdom itself is widely considered as something merely relative, subjective, and, from a scientific point of view, probably non-existent.

(Kriyananda 2009, 163-164)

In the beginning of my research I still tended to think of wisdom as something merely “mystical” and, at the very end, disconnected from my concrete life. The experience of “active” silence forced me to change my mind, by means of simple daily lessons of practical wisdom, such as the training of detached observation and attentive listening. For example, silence gave me the space to “metabolize” my mistakes reducing the sense of failure to its own real, relative position, diminishing my tendency to make failure an absolute and welcoming it as an opportunity for a greater success.

I realized that at a certain moment I was tempted, as an extreme counter-reaction, to deny the existence of failure. Failure is often related to the frustration of a positive expectation: whenever I have a positive expectation, the fear of failure may come. I was thinking: if I have no expectations, I will never again experience failure. To a certain extent I still think it is true.

If the ego belongs to the ever changing world of phenomena, ruled by the law of cause and effect, the Self exists beyond relativity. Since failure is a relative passage in any educational path, I could say that it is experienced only by the ego: failure does not touch the Self. And since the Self is already in a condition of fulfilment, there can be no expectations in it. But, as Śaṅkara (789 CE, the most rigorous master of the non-dualistic Indian philosophy) teaches: *“Before the awakening (prabhoda), we have to admit the reality of the world”*.

(Piano 1996, 172)

By means of our daily training in silent objective self-observation, I arrived at admitting that, if it is true that our real essence is already free and in peace, most of the time we are not aware of that: we have to make the effort to awaken our awareness. How could we start this enterprise without at least the expectation that in the end it is possible to attain the supreme goal of Self-realization? The intuition that reality is not as it appears to be does not mean that reality is inexistent. And failure as well: maybe it is not real in an absolute sense, but it still exists in its own relative position.

I finally began to reason in a practical way. Without sense of failure, there would be no sense of risk. And without sense of risk, there would be no challenges, no growth, no success. In silence I had the opportunity to let the uncomfortable feelings, derived from temporary falls in my pedagogical process, calm down. I had the space to operate a distinction between the real happenings and my own thoughts and emotions. It became clear that the

problem in itself was never too big, the obstacles were never unsurpassable. Less and less I found myself thinking: I can't. My new "mantra" became: not yet! As the guru and philosopher Paramahansa Yogananda used to say to encourage the seekers of all paths, with words close to the Christian tradition: *"Saints are those sinners, who never gave up!"* (Yogananda 2002, 127).

Exactly success has been one of the feelings shining in the hearts of our group, at the end of our adventure, together with the humble awareness that this is just a little step towards the real fulfilment of the soul, as emerges for example from the feedback of one performer of our team:

Thank you for this unforgettable opportunity to work on something so essential and so relevant in our time. I believe, or know, it has changed my life and moved the silence within me. My practice has gotten much, much deeper and still I know this is just the beginning.

(Jyri, performer in "Moving the Silence")

Speaking now about my own personal experience, I feel able to affirm that the practice of "active" silence has helped me to embrace risks with courage, with clearness for learning from mistakes, non-attachment towards the final result of my actions, developing at the same time a feeling of trust in the process and in the group without losing passion for my work: one of the fruits of this long adventure has been the maturation of a "passionate" non-attachment (Kriyananda 2011, 166), allowing me to work with enthusiasm, but at the same time aware that the products of my work were not in my hands. How can I not find a resonance with the popular sentence that the Christian tradition attributes to Ignatius Loyola: *"pray as if everything depends on God, work as if everything depends on you!"*.

7. CONCLUSION

The first week of the “Moving the Silence”-workshop represented for me and for many participants a radical turnover in our own lives, offering us the opportunity to taste a new creative and meditative life style. But now, after four months of daily practice of silence, I cannot notice any revolutionary change in me. I think that the process went so deep that changes will be revealed little by little, in the future. I just have the perception that my life is starting to move towards a more clear direction, I feel silence as a part of my life and I know that I have to go on, researching “active” silence. The potential of the mutual interaction between meditation and art is precious and wide.

Silence proved to be a fruitful ground for a dialogue between art and spirituality. In silence we have been able to build a “holy” space, allowing our artistic/pedagogic research and our spiritual research to become one, or at least to walk together. Silence proved to be a generative platform for developing meditative ways of working in the field of art.

Throughout our rehearsals of the “Moving the Silence”-performance, I realized that the core of my interest was not silence in itself, but the meditative attitude generated in silence. Among all the positive after-effects of our practice, I could affirm that our working atmosphere has been a concrete answer to the problem of the stress caused by a dispersive environment. At the beginning of our experience, for example, I had to fight against my own rooted habit of looking for false relaxation by means of distractions, especially during the pauses: it was not easy to accept just to be. I noticed that at the end of our working days I was tired, because of my effort in concentration. I felt tired, but not stressed at all. And little by little I became capable of working for many hours in a condition of complete and relaxed concentration. I could observe similar changes in the whole group.

Thinking about future developments, I can imagine one of my next steps: in the context of a pedagogy of silence, gradually and carefully to open the possibility of using voice as another possible tool of artistic expression, maintaining a constant connection with our own inner silence.

The stimulating cooperation with Eerika Arposalo and Rev. Henri Järvinen represented for me the first great step of this process.

Working together with Eerika has been the most educational human exchange that I have experienced in these years of Master studies. Eerika's spontaneous wisdom has been teaching me much about acceptance, calmness, patience and, most of all, the courage to be positive-minded. Eerika said that she learnt from me to treat people fairly, regardless of their own skills or professional backgrounds. I felt that our two charismas were balancing and empowering each other. I matured a profound respect towards Eerika's attitude of welcoming any happening or person as the best opportunity to learn something important about life. The friendship born from our encounter is an encouraging sign, full of meaning, which fills my heart with gratitude and hope.

And the wonderful group with which we could build the "Moving the Silence"-performance is another gift, increasing my courage to attempt new ways and to take new risks.

How not to mention at this point the remarkable help of my supervisor teacher, Kaija Kangas? Her presence throughout these two years of work has been powerful and respectful at the same time, revealing an empathetic attunement with my procedures and with the topic of silence. One day she told me that silence and meditation had been an important part of her own personal artistic path. She supported me with the wisest suggestions that a pedagogue-artist could offer to a student: her own personal silent meditation and a lot of open questions!

Looking back to all these pages, I notice that I have been writing a good deal about a topic which does not require any word... But still I feel that this is just a good start, to be continued, hopefully, in my doctoral studies.

I dedicate this work to Father Anthony Elenjimittam, who perfectly embodied the message of unity, peace and enlightenment that he promoted for almost one century, walking on the same path as his master Mahatma Gandhi. Since the first day we met, Father Anthony's humble greatness has been an inspiring and living presence, abiding in a special place in my heart.

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ATTACHMENT

The “Moving the Silence”-team:

Facilitators: Eerika Arposalo, Gabriele Gorla

Sound design, musician: Tero Kaunisvuo

Lighting design: Janne Björklöf

Spiritual guide: Henri Järvinen

Performers: Tanja Eloranta, Henri Järvinen, Gesa Piper, Saija Luukkonen, Harri Rantala, Jyri Sucksdorff, Joni Valtonen, Katerina Zherbina, Gabriele Gorla, Eerika Arposalo

Stage manager: Vesa Rämä

Sound support: Heikki Laakso

Lighting technician: Emil Pääkkönen

Props: Heli Hyytiä

Costumes: Terttu Torkkola, Arja Nuppola, Hannele Kekkonen

Audiovisual support: Jyri Oksaharju

Poster and programme: Jaana Forsström

Producer: Nina Numminen

Photos: Miso Macura

Première: 9.2.2013, at University of the Arts Helsinki Theatre Academy