



# *Unfolding Embodied Peaces through Dance and Movement*

Open Floor Conscious Dance and Movement Practice as a  
Transrational Resource for Peace

Doctoral Dissertation

*International Studies in Peace, Conflict and Development*

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***Unfolding Embodied Peaces through Dance and Movement***

***Open Floor Conscious Dance and Movement Practice as a Transrational Resource for Peace***

Report submitted by Hanne Tjersland in order to be eligible for  
a doctoral degree awarded by the Universitat Jaume I

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*To Mansoor*

*May our souls always dance together.*

مجے تم سے عشق ہے

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## Glossary of Key Terms

**Open Floor:** the conscious dance and movement practice that is explored in this research. It is also the conscious dance and movement practice that the author practices and teaches.

**Conscious dance and movement:** dance and movement practices that are characterized by not teaching fixed dance steps or choreographies but works in process-oriented manners with spontaneous dance and movement expressions that emerge within and between the dancers and movers who are present. These practices are furthermore not performative dance and movement practices that includes external audiences. Moreover, all these practices tend to bring central focus onto embodied awareness and attention as a vital part of the practice.

**Open Floor International:** the organization and legal frame behind Open Floor.

**Embodied peaces:** a lived web of peaces that emphasizes and affirms embodied wholeness and relational ‘inner-outer’ engagement. In the research, it is described as a web of peaces that is holistic, relational, interconnected, and, obviously, embodied, yet also imperfect, contradictory, paradoxical, ever-transforming, multifaceted, and contextualized.

**Embodied/embodiment:** the process of being and becoming an embodied whole. It is thus, in the context of this research, understood as a process and experience of embracing, affirming, unfolding, and engaging the paradoxical ‘inner-outer’ and wholeness-oriented existence that embodied living is.

**‘Disembodiment’/‘disembodied’:** in this research, it is defined as the experiential possibility to ‘think oneself apart - thus splitting different ‘inner parts’ of oneself (such as ‘body’ and

‘mind’) as well as radically separating the ‘inner’ from the ‘outer. Humans are, *as embodied wholes*, capable of this ‘disembodied’ experience.

**Onto-epistemologies (as well as ethics):** the interpenetrating realities between ontologies (being) and epistemologies (knowing) - as well as ethics - describing the lived interconnection between what we (think we) can know (ontologies) and how we (think we) can know it (epistemologies) - as well as how these onto-epistemological entanglements constantly influence how we act upon and are in the world (ethics).

**Transrational peace philosophy:** a core peace philosophy that this research leans upon. Within this philosophy, peaces (in plural) are not understood as a static end-state or a perfect ‘One Truth’ but an ongoing, often paradoxical, and always imperfect dance that manifests new and different peaces - dynamic equilibriums - on an ongoing basis as manifold conflicts and homeostatic imbalances are engaged and transformed. As such, a transrational peace philosophy emphasizes dynamic (dis)equilibriums, holistic ‘inner-outer’ engagement, as well as elicitive approaches, which are approaches that seek to listen to, underline, and draw upon the inherent resources already present within a context, setting, and/or group rather than prescribing ‘correct’ ways or solutions from ‘without’.

## Abstract

This research explores the question: *in which ways can Open Floor help unfold embodied peaces?* It engages the conscious dance and movement practice Open Floor to investigate how new and different *embodied* possibilities for being, becoming, knowing, and relating can (re)manifest. Nevertheless, the research starts from the so-called ‘opposite side’, exploring how a ‘disembodied’, Cartesian-inspired ‘mind-body’ separation influences and restricts ongoing ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating both ‘within’ and ‘without’. This Cartesian-inspired ‘mind-body’ separation is in this context understood as a lived onto-epistemological heritage that still influences in conscious and unconscious manners.

From here, the research taps into new and different embodied possibilities through engaging Open Floor. The author has in this respect conducted in-depth, qualitative, and narrative interviews with seven long-term Open Floor practitioners (teachers) through a relational interview approach. The research therefore moves through a multifaceted dance and conversation that focuses upon lived dance and movement experiences, narrative processes of meaning-making, as well as transformative encounters with embodied peaces both on and off the dance floor. Ultimately, the research arrives at a core understanding of Open Floor as a practice that can potentially help unfold embodied peace possibilities due to how it can help individuals and collectives continuously affirm, engage, and (re)unfold the ever-emerging dance of embodied wholeness that both they and others *are* - as well as constantly also are becoming in different manners anew.

## El resumen y la conclusión de la investigación (en castellano)

### Resumen

Esta investigación explora la pregunta: *¿de qué maneras puede el Open Floor ayudar a desdoblar las paces encarnadas?* Involucra la práctica de danza y movimiento consciente Open Floor para investigar cómo se pueden (re)manifestar posibilidades nuevas y diferentes de ser, llegar a ser, conocer y relacionarse *encarnadas*. La investigación comienza desde el llamado ‘lado opuesto’, explorando cómo una separación ‘mente-cuerpo’ ‘incorpórea’, de inspiración cartesiana, influye y restringe maneras actuales de ser, llegar a ser, conocer y relacionarse tanto ‘dentro’ como ‘fuera’. En este contexto, se entiende la separación ‘mente-cuerpo’ de inspiración cartesiana como una herencia onto-epistemológica vivida que todavía sigue influyendo de maneras conscientes e inconscientes.

A partir de aquí, la investigación explora nuevas y diferentes posibilidades encarnadas a través de involucrar la práctica de Open Floor. Siguiendo esta línea, la autora ha realizado entrevistas en profundidad de carácter narrativo y cualitativo con siete practicantes de dilatada experiencia (maestros) de Open Floor a través de un enfoque relacional. Por lo tanto, la investigación avanza a través de una danza y conversación multifacética que se centra en experiencias de danza y movimiento vividas, procesos narrativos de creación de significado, así como encuentros transformadores con las paces encarnadas tanto dentro como fuera de la pista de baile. En última instancia, la investigación desemboca en un entendimiento central de Open Floor como una práctica que puede ayudar a desdoblar posibilidades de paces encarnadas gracias a las formas en la que puede ayudar a individuos y colectivos a afirmar, involucrar y (re)desplegar continuamente la danza de la totalidad encarnada, siempre emergente, que tanto ellos como otros lo *son* - así como también se llegan constantemente a ser en maneras diferentes de nuevo.

## **Conclusión - Llegando a una Continuación Encarnada**

'*Cogito ergo sum*'. "Pienso, luego existo (Descartes 2017a: 25)." Esta investigación se ha desarrollado de muchas maneras a partir de las implicaciones vividas (in)conscientemente que yo misma he notado, sentido, experimentado, encarnado, luchado, vivido, resistido y buscado transformar a lo largo de mi vida en relación con la herencia onto-epistemológica 'incorpórea' que esta famosa frase - junto, por supuesto, con otros argumentos y razonamientos filosóficos 'occidentales' - ha ayudado a cimentar y reforzar en, especialmente, aunque no exclusivamente, modos 'occidentales' de ser, llegar a ser, conocer y relacionarse. En este sentido, es una frase que todavía sigue influyendo tanto en mí como en mi entorno de maneras sentidas y encarnadas, y que ha contribuido a allanar el camino para una división profunda, y dolorosa, entre 'cuerpo' y 'mente' - lo material y lo inmaterial - influyente, a su vez, de formas conscientes e inconscientes.

Debido a esto, he desarrollado una investigación que ha explorado, comprendido y ayudado a transformar estas formas 'incorpóreas' de ser, llegar a ser, conocer y relacionarse a través de (re)involucrar intencionalmente aquellas formas encarnadas. Por lo tanto, he basado mi exploración en la práctica de danza y movimiento consciente que yo misma practico y enseño: *Open Floor*, pudiendo así explorar este tejido de paz encarnado a través de un campo en que acumulo una experiencia rica, significativa y, precisamente, encarnada. Considero que este anclaje personal y encarnado es vital *tanto* para el tema de investigación *como* para un acto más amplio de 'desobediencia epistémica' (Mignolo y Walsh 2018, Mignolo 2009) al que también he tratado de contribuir. Con esto, me he involucrado con una red vivida de *paces encarnadas*, que he descrito imperfectamente como una red de paces que se manifiesta a partir de una afirmación dinámica y orientada a la totalidad del ser, llegar a ser, conocer y relacionarse de formas encarnadas. Entonces, las paces encarnadas son holísticas,

relacionales, interconectadas y, obviamente, encarnadas, pero también imperfectas, paradójicas, constantemente transformándose, contradictorias, multifacéticas y contextualizadas. A este respecto, me he apoyado en una filosofía de paz transracional (Dietrich 2012, 2013, 2018, Echavarría Alvarez et al. 2018, Koppensteiner 2020, Ditzel Facci 2020, Tjersland y Ditzel Facci 2019), entre otros, para centrarme en las paces como un proceso constantemente en movimiento a través y entre múltiples (des)equilibrios homeostáticos. He enfatizado la involucración relacional y orientada a la totalidad, la transformación sistémica y *ambas* la diferenciación e integración continuas. Además, he definido dos aspectos centrales en relación con la noción clave de *encarnado/encarnación*, que conciernen a la existencia encarnada como un proceso de 1) *totalidad paradójica* y 2) *relacionalidad 'interior-exterior'*.

La(s) pregunta(s) de investigación que he aplicado para guiar mi exploración es/(son):

**¿De qué maneras puede el Open Floor ayudar a desdoblar las paces encarnadas?**

- 1) ¿Qué dinámicas incluyen las paces encarnadas? ¿Cómo se integran estas dinámicas en Open Floor?
- 2) ¿Cómo influye y restringe una división entre ‘cuerpo’ y ‘mente’ de inspiración cartesiana las posibilidades ‘interior-exterior’ de paces encarnadas? ¿Cómo pueden transformarse estas dinámicas?
- 3) ¿De qué maneras ha la práctica de Open Floor desdoblado potenciales de paces encarnadas en vidas de practicantes de dilatada experiencia (maestros) en el Open Floor? ¿Existen también limitaciones y/o posibilidades adicionales para Open Floor en este respecto?

A lo largo de la investigación, he explorado respuestas significativas de esta(s) pregunta(s) a través de una metodología narrativa que me ha ayudado a aprovechar narrativas e historias como lente básica para *comprender, interpretar y recopilar información* con respecto a esta(s) pregunta(s) de investigación. Por lo tanto, he aplicado un ‘pensamiento narrativo’ (Clandinin y Connelly 2000, Kim 2016) durante todo el proceso de investigación, partiendo de la comprensión básica de que los humanos son seres narrativos e históricos que, en gran medida, dan significado y sentido a sus experiencias a través de las formas en que narran



estas experiencias a sí mismos y el uno al otro (de maneras verbales y más-que-verbales). En este contexto, he definido las narrativas y las historias como procesos encarnados en lugar de ‘incorpóreos’, basándome en la filosofía del lenguaje de Gendlin (1997, 2004, 2007) para argumentar que las palabras y la sensación sentida no son opuestos incompatibles sino socios dinámicos en un flujo interrelacionado. Entonces, las historias y narrativas son 1) *procesos dinámicos y holísticos de creación de significado* y 2) representan poderosos potenciales para *encuentros íntimos y relacionales*. Como la principal elección metodológica, he realizado entrevistas en profundidad de carácter narrativo y cualitativo con siete practicantes de dilatada experiencia (maestros) de Open Floor, escuchando relacionamente a las historias, ideas y reflexiones que estos maestros comparten en relación con sus experiencias de danza y movimiento vividas. Particularmente, se le ha preguntado cómo han cambiado y transformado a través de la práctica del Open Floor.

¿En este contexto, qué he llegado a comprender más profundamente con respecto a ***las maneras en que el Open Floor puede ayudar a desdoblarse las paces encarnadas?*** ¿Qué respuestas he encontrado en relación con mi(s) pregunta(s) de investigación? En los dos capítulos primeros teóricos, he abordado algunas ideas básicas relacionadas con las dos primeras familias de sub-preguntas que he realizado. En el capítulo 2, he explorado las implicaciones vividas que pueden manifestarse a partir de la herencia ‘mente-cuerpo’ de inspiración cartesiana, investigando metáforas, cualidades, formas de ser, llegar a ser, conocer y relacionarse que pueden evolucionar a partir de estas formas ‘incorpóreas’ para involucrarse consigo mismo y con el mundo. Es importante señalar que lo he hecho a través de un proceso de conocimiento *empático y compasivo*, que me ha ayudado a comprender de manera transformadora, en lugar de simplemente criticar cómo y por qué los individuos y los colectivos participan en dinámicas ‘incorpóreas’ de estas maneras. En este contexto, he enfatizado que los humanos, en niveles ontológicos, no pueden ser verdaderamente

desencarnados, sino que entiendo la ‘descorporeización’ (entre comillas) como una posibilidad experiencial de la que los humanos, *como totalidades encarnadas*, son capaces.

En este sentido, una de las formas centrales en que *la división ‘mente-cuerpo’ de inspiración cartesiana influye y restringe las posibilidades ‘interiores-exteriores’ de paces encarnadas* tiene que ver con una idea (in)consciente de atomismo - que, basándome en Midgley (2001), he definido como la idea de que la única manera de que es posible conocer algo es dividirlo en sus ‘partes’ más pequeñas y, desde este punto de partida, intentar descubrir cómo estas ‘partes’, al igual que una máquina, también pueden ‘encajar juntas’ - ayuda a desdoblar múltiples formas de ser, llegar a ser, conocer y relacionarse ‘incorpóreamente’ tanto ‘dentro’ como ‘fuera’. Esta comprensión atomista deja poco espacio para la totalidad encarnada, ya que uno más bien (in)conscientemente divide las totalidades encarnadas en ‘partes internas’ estáticas, jerárquicas y distintas, así como separa radicalmente lo ‘interior’ de lo ‘exterior’. Esto conlleva consecuencias notables, considerando que las paces encarnadas implican comprometerse afirmativamente, en lugar de tratar de ‘controlar’ o evitar, este campo multifacético e interconectado que es la existencia encarnada. Por lo tanto, *las paces encarnadas incluyen un tejido entrelazado de múltiples dinámicas encarnadas-relacionales*, en cuyo contexto he enfatizado el dinamismo continuo, la inclusión paradójica (de ambas-y), así como la (re)conexión ‘interior-exterior’. *En cuanto a cómo las dinámicas ‘incorpóreas’ pueden potencialmente transformarse*, subrayo un compromiso dinámico y entrelazado *tanto* con las dinámicas ‘internas’ *como* con las ‘externas’, así como *tanto* con las dinámicas de arriba hacia abajo *como* con las dinámicas de abajo hacia arriba, como medio para (re)involucrar afirmativamente la totalidad encarnada en lugar de ‘dividirla en partes’. Incluye, por ejemplo, la involucración metafórica del yo como proceso más que como entidad fija (Epstein 1995), los conocimientos de las paradojas plásticas (Doidge 2007), la percatación de cómo el ‘placer’ y el ‘dolor’ no se mantienen

separados (Damasio 2007). 2018, Pearce 2020), la importancia de los *desequilibrios* (Doigide 2007, Diamond 2007), las sensaciones cruciales de la seguridad suficiente (Porges 2011, 2017), la práctica continua de ampliar en lugar de romper las 'ventanas de tolerancia' (Siegel 2011).

En el capítulo 3, me he involucrado en el Open Floor. He *descrito* Open Floor como una práctica de danza y movimiento consciente, que implica que no enseña pasos de danza fijos o coreografías, sino que trabaja de maneras orientadas al proceso con las expresiones espontáneas de danza y movimiento que surgen 'dentro' y entre quienes están presentes. Además, he enfatizado el dinamismo fundamental que implica Open Floor, que, entre otras, se basa en cómo los fundadores y miembros fundadores de Open Floor International querían manifestar en el Open Floor una práctica que se basa en un vasto conjunto de sabiduría encarnada en lugar de una escuela de pensamiento estricta, así como una práctica que puede ser 'remezclada' continuamente de manera colaborativa dependiendo de los enfoques y necesidades siempre cambiantes de quienes la practican. Por lo tanto, esto implica que Open Floor International está estructurado de acuerdo con sociocracia/dynamic governance (Rau y Koch-González 2018) y se encuentra bajo una licencia creative commons (n.a). Sus valores fundamentales enfatizan además la exploración, la inclusión y la transformación continua.

Al involucrar adicionalmente los diferentes elementos que forman parte del plan de estudios de Open Floor - incluyendo 'anclas encarnadas', 'movimiento como continuos', 'el ciclo de movimiento', 'el tejido de experiencia 4x4' y 'recursos centrales del movimiento' - he *reflexionado* imperfectamente sobre ***cómo se integraran las dinámicas de las paces encarnadas en el Open Floor***. En este sentido, he enfatizado que Open Floor tiende a abordar la danza humana como un proceso en constante transformación que emerge de maneras nuevas y diferentes a través de y entre totalidades encarnadas-relacionales. Además, esta danza, encarnada-relacional, emerge como una red paradójica que incluye *tanto* 'partes'

diferenciadas *como* un todo indiviso. He igualmente subrayado cómo Open Floor es una práctica más *elicitiva* que prescriptiva (Lederach 1995), especialmente en relación con su enfoque orientado al movimiento y basado en recursos. Además, he comenzado a abordar de manera *crítica* cómo Open Floor - como ocurre con todas las prácticas y campos - conlleva *tanto* fortalezas socioculturales *como* puntos ciegos/limitaciones. Esto es particularmente pertinente en relación con una diversidad actualmente ‘limitada’ de cuerpos que parecen estar plena y auténticamente incluidos en la práctica y el campo. Por lo tanto, he encontrado esencial explorar algunos contextos socioculturales e históricos clave que fundamentan el Open Floor, incluida la danza y el movimiento consciente, Gabrielle Roth y la práctica de los 5 Ritmos, el Movimiento del Potencial Humano y los enfoques humanistas/transpersonales de la psicología, así como diversos campos de interés que los fundadores y miembros fundadores iniciales de Open Floor trajeron consigo. De esta manera, cabe comprender, de forma incompleta, cómo y por qué estas diferentes fortalezas y puntos ciegos/limitaciones del Open Floor.

En el principal capítulo exploratorio, el número 4, he abordado relacionamente las entrevistas en profundidad de carácter narrativo y cualitativo que he realizado con siete practicantes de dilata experiencia (maestros) en el Open Floor. He aprovechado un proceso holístico de conocimiento a través de una *hermenéutica de la restauración* (Josselson 2004), lo que implica que he dado un salto de fe interpretativo y creído que los maestros de Open Floor han podido y han estado dispuestos a compartir, al mejor de sus capacidades, “su sentido de su experiencia subjetiva y su creación de significado (Josselson 2004: 5).” Por lo tanto, he permitido que los maestros de Open Floor centren y dirijan la discusión, pero he también iniciado un multilogo relacional al incluir mis reflexiones personales, así como literatura relevante. En particular, esta ha sido una manera fructífera de explorar más profundamente la última familia de sub-preguntas abordada, que gira en torno a *cómo la*

*práctica de Open Floor ha desarrollado potenciales de paces encarnadas en las vidas de siete maestros únicos de Open Floor, así como también puede haber limitaciones/más potencialidades de Open Floor en este sentido.*

En relación con Gunvor, he explorado cómo la inclusión de *ambos* la seguridad/confianza y de la novedad/expansión dentro de espacios facilitados son vitales porque el nuevo aprendizaje y la transformación encarnados luchan por evolucionarse si falta alguno de los ‘lados’ de este equilibrio dinámico. En este contexto, he enfatizado que los seres humanos, como totalidades encarnadas, necesitan sentirse *tanto* lo suficientemente seguros (relacionalmente) *como* ser desafiados en el despliegue de mayores posibilidades para que los aprendizajes y transformaciones nuevos y diferentes puedan ocurrir. En particular, he examinado cómo Open Floor no es solo una práctica facilitada - con facilitación entendida como un proceso de ‘hacer más fácil’ y ‘habilitar’ (Koppensteiner 2020: 170) - sino también una práctica *encarnada-relacional* que, a través de, entre otras cosas, un compromiso dinámico de la interacción seguridad/confianza-novedad/expansión, puede así contribuir a ‘mediar en el ser’ (Palmer 1993, Lederach 2005) nuevas y diferentes posibilidades *encarnadas-relacionales*. Gunvor además ha ayudado a resaltar cómo este proceso encarnado-relacional puede, entre otros, suceder a través de la facilitación de experiencias comunitarias afirmativas, donde *tanto* lo individualmente único *como* lo colectivo compartido pueden ser auténticamente co-involucrados.

Con Marisu, es la historia dinámica de la psicóloga tranquila con rodillas que organizaban su vida y los procesos interconectados de (auto)aceptación curativa y la pertenencia radical ‘interno-exterior’ que ella ha desplegado allí, que se han colocado en el centro de nuestra interacción. En este sentido, Marisu me ha ayudado a enfatizar la presencia crucial de la pertenencia, así como el esfuerzo activo (más que pasivo) de una inclusión auténtica cuando se trata de las paces. Entre otras cosas, es relevante en relación con las

estructuras (in)conscientes de exclusión capacitista. A este respecto, por un lado, hemos discutido conjuntamente cómo el Open Floor puede ayudar a manifestar potenciales 'internos-externos' de pertenencia e inclusión al invitar a las personas a bailar y moverse de acuerdo con sus propias posibilidades en lugar de hacerlo desde 'afuera', así como ayudando a uno a sanar y transformar las dinámicas de vergüenza que reducen el contacto a través del aprovechamiento de la paradoja central entre la (auto)aceptación incondicional y la emergencia continua hacia nuevas posibilidades. Por otro lado, hemos incompletamente involucrado cómo Open Floor aún necesita involucrar un tejido de más posibilidades, encontrando formas nuevas y diferentes de incluir una diversidad más amplia de individuos y grupos dentro de la práctica y la organización. A este respecto, he defendido una doble iniciativa de (auto)reflexividad (Kester y Cremin 2017), a través de que podemos en Open Floor, individual y colectivamente, ayudarnos unos a otros a practicar el decir 'nosotros' en lugar de 'ellos' conforme reflexionamos juntos sobre las maneras que estamos tanto implicados (Rothberg 2019) de diferentes formas, como afectados por múltiples dinámicas y estructuras de inclusión y exclusión.

Tamara, a su vez, me ha ayudado a enfatizar la posibilidad continua de desarrollar mayores potencialidades, especialmente en lo que respecta a la relacionalidad encarnada. Una de las dinámicas clave que surgió de nuestra reunión se refiere a este respecto a la opción de no "tener que elegir entre (...) ser... auténtico y estar con la gente", enfatizando, en cambio, el potencial del Open Floor de facilitar posibilidades nuevas y diferentes que permiten a uno de co-involucrar lo 'interior' y lo 'exterior' en lugar de separarlos y 'elegir entre ellos'. Incluye, entre otras cosas, la práctica vivida de emerger cambios metafóricos encarnados, que implican la participación simultánea de 'mapas viscerales' de abajo hacia arriba (Siegel 2011) y dinámicas de creación de significado de arriba hacia abajo que pueden 'resaltar' en lugar de 'ocultar'. ' (Lakoff y Johnson 1980: 10-13) las maneras encarnadas. Además, implica la

conciencia simultánea de la responsabilidad *tanto* individual *como* colectiva de la transformación y el cambio. En este contexto, he enfatizado cómo Open Floor no puede ser verdaderamente transformador si (in)conscientemente pone toda la responsabilidad de la transformación y el cambio únicamente en los individuos. Más bien, necesita involucrar conjuntamente las realidades colectivas más amplias en las que viven los individuos y los grupos. Entre otras cosas, es relevante en relación con una práctica encarnada y paradójica de recurrir a uno mismo en entornos ‘incorpóreos’, así como en relación con un esfuerzo ‘arriesgado’ de atreverse activamente (en lugar de "sólo ad hoc") a involucrar la diferencia encarnada de maneras más auténticamente inclusivas, transformadoras y afirmativas de la vida.

En relación con Imraan, he explorado un camino interpersonal de curación que se ha centrado en “cómo ser vulnerable”. Cómo ser, um... auténtico. (...) Cómo permanecer en la integridad, (...) y, eh... intimidad, explorando la intimidad en diferentes maneras”. A este respecto, Imraan ha compartido múltiples dinámicas relacionales de su entorno más cercano y lejano, relacionadas, entre otras cosas, con sus experiencias de crecer como una persona ‘no blanca’ durante el régimen del apartheid sudafricano. He abordado cómo tales experiencias de violencia física y estructural pueden provocar respuestas traumáticas; sin embargo, a través de la manera aparentemente sanativa y dinámica de Imraan de integrar estas experiencias, me he centrado en cómo tales experiencias también pueden sanar y/o no quedar incrustadas como trauma desde el principio mediante un proceso relacional de *corregulación*. Como expresa Badenoch: “la esencia del trauma no son los eventos, sino la soledad dentro de ellos (Badenoch 2017: 25)”. Por lo tanto, aunque Open Floor no es una terapia, Imraan me ha ayudado a subrayar que el Open Floor aún puede apoyar tales procesos co-regulativos a través de, por ejemplo, el surgimiento de momentos relacionales compartidos de vulnerabilidad, autenticidad, integridad e intimidad encarnados. En este contexto, he llegado

a una comprensión básica de la curación, en contextos de violencia y más allá, como una ‘expresión artística de resiliencia’ (Lederach y Lederach 2010: 227), a través de que las ‘flores de dolor’ vividas (Lystad 2020) pueden integrarse y transformarse dinámicamente (en lugar de ‘fijarse o ‘eliminarse’) en una danza continua de co-ser, co-llegar a ser, co-conocer y co-relacionar.

Además, Rivi ha atraído mi atención hacia los procesos almados y espirituosos (así como inspirados) de presencia, equilibrio, inspiración y conexión que van más allá de la dinámica de curación únicamente para tocar directamente los procesos de creatividad, el desdoblado y las paces. Por lo tanto, ayuda a resaltar cómo el Open Floor puede ser un recurso para las paces también en términos de ser una “práctica afirmativa para una vida activa (Koppensteiner 2009: 175)”. En este sentido, he definido el ‘alma’ como un proceso de equilibrio e integración encarnado y orientado a la totalidad (en lugar de una ‘esencia y núcleo’ individual), que incluye dinámicas sensoriales, emocionales y mentales, pero que también es más grande y más-que la mera unión de estas dinámicas. El ‘espíritu’ ha sido definido como un proceso, un campo y una fuente de plenitud más amplio que ambos *es* y está danzando más allá de este proceso personal del alma. En este sentido, Rivi me ha ayudado a subrayar cómo Open Floor puede convertirse en un contribuidor de cultivar a estos procesos almados, espirituosos e inspirados al ser una práctica dinámica y orientada a la totalidad que puede ayudar a (re)manifestar constantemente equilibrios homeostáticos nuevos y diferentes en lugar de esperar que los desequilibrios se vuelvan abrumadores y enormes. En este contexto, los procesos de (re)conexiones respiratorias, inspiración, juego/el carácter juguetón, habilidades para estar presente con dinámicas múltiples e incluso contradictorias, la interacción continua entre un ‘yo infantil’ sensorial, espontáneo y juguetón y, un ‘yo adulto’ consciente y reflexivo, así como las capacidades vividas de ‘resiliencia’, ‘fluidez’ y ‘elección’ - en contextos de paces y conflictos más amplios y en procesos cotidianos ‘más



pequeños' de equilibrios y desequilibrios - se vuelven esenciales . Por lo tanto, he terminado describiendo las paces encarnadas como una danza dinámica de, precisamente, 'múltiples'.

Junto a Stefan, he explorado una sensación de tranquilidad sentida que dice algo profundamente significativo sobre el tejido paradójico que constituyen las paces encarnadas. En este sentido, es una sensación de tranquilidad sentida que es imperfecta, dinámica, relacional y paradójica, por lo que no excluye el esfuerzo, las tensiones, el dolor, sino que lo integra todo en un proceso paradójico de vivir. Por lo tanto, emerge como una realidad experimentada y una potencialidad encarnada que siempre está disponible en las vidas encarnadas-relacionales, manifestándose a través de y entre nuestras capacidades para afirmar y aceptar lo que *es* y nuestras capacidades para *elegir* una dirección distinta para bailar. A este respecto, Stefan y yo hemos discutido sobre cómo el Open Floor puede, potencialmente, ayudar a alimentar esa sensación de tranquilidad sentida a través, entre otras cosas, del cultivo de una capacidad espaciosa para '*romme*'. Implica incluir y comprometer tanto lo que *es* como lo que también puede llegar a ser a través de un proceso que sea al mismo tiempo lo suficientemente limitado, sólido y contractivo, así como lo suficientemente abierto, suave y expansivo. De esta manera, uno puede ser y llegar a ser en su "registro entero, completo de ser humano". Además, nos hemos adentrado en cómo Open Floor también puede ayudar a manifestar esta sensación de tranquilidad sentida a través de un proceso afirmativo de lenguaje, a través del cual palabras encarnadas que 'tienen sentido' (Gendlin 1997, 2004, 2007) pueden apoyar un proceso 'interno-externo' de comprensión relacional y *trygghet* (suficiente seguridad/confianza 'interno-exterior'), así como una (re)expresión de voz potencialmente curativa que permite que las experiencias sin voz e incluso 'lo indescriptible' (Lederach y Lederach 2010) se transformen en espacios relacionales de comunidad, comprensión y amor nuevamente. La última palabra que he destacado, 'amor', es en este sentido un proceso vital para las paces encarnadas en general, avanzando hacia el surgimiento

de esos momentos potencialmente *(re)conectivos* de responsabilidad encarnada compartida, necesidad y cuidado de *cómo* nuestros seres interconectados y convivientes evolucionan.

Al final de la investigación, Lori me ayudó a involucrarme en el movimiento continuo de integración (y diferenciación). Este movimiento integrador ha sido relevante en relación *tanto* con lo que Lori explica, *como* en relación con una danza integradora inicial que he comenzado a realizar en relación con el proceso más amplio de investigación. En este contexto, he llegado a una comprensión general de seis formas fundamentales en las que Open Floor puede potencialmente ayudar a desdoblar las paces encarnadas. Se refieren a Open Floor como una práctica que está 1) *encarnada*, 2) *orientada al movimiento*, 3) *basada en recursos*, 4) *relacional*, 5) *facilitada* e 6) *integrada en una estructura organizacional dinámica*. En relación con la dimensión *encarnada*, Lori y yo discutimos sobre cómo Open Floor puede ayudar a desdoblar potenciales de paces encarnadas a través del apoyo para aprovechar la propia existencia encarnada (y la de los demás) como (ya) *es* un todo en lugar de una 'integridad futura' que (todavía) necesita ser creada. Por lo tanto, no se trata de lo que 'debería' o 'no debería' ser, sino de 'derretir' con amor, compasión, empatía y comprensión esas 'constricciones' que impiden que uno reconozca y experimente esta totalidad que *es*. Por lo tanto, se interconecta con cómo el Open Floor, como práctica *orientada al movimiento*, puede ayudar a abordar la paradoja central de la curación, la transformación y las paces, que se refiere a cómo la transformación y el cambio surgen de una aceptación simultánea de lo que *es* (Brach 2003) y la necesidad de desdoblar nuevas posibilidades. De esta manera, uno puede 'alimentar (en lugar de luchar contra) sus demonios' (Allione 2008), manifestando un proceso de curación emocional que le permite ser más de lo que *es* y más de lo que también puede llegar a ser. Además, a través de su enfoque *basado en recursos*, Open Floor puede ayudar a cultivar un proceso de presencia y equilibrio alzado, espiritual e inspirado que, en última instancia, ayuda a uno a bailar con y como el vibrante baile de la vida misma.

Dado que Open Floor es además una práctica *relacional*, puede también ayudar a uno a reconocer y participar en cómo este baile afirmativo de la totalidad ‘dentro’ se conecta e interrelaciona con y se despliega como el baile afirmativo de totalidad ‘fuera’ - y viceversa. De este modo, uno puede co-participar en una red dinámica de *interser* (Hanh 2017), manifestando un proceso de totalidad que no se trata ni de una totalidad ‘separada’ ‘allá afuera’ ni de una ‘esencia individual’ ‘dentro’, sino de una red viva de co-ser, co-llegar a ser, co-conocer y co-relacionar encarnado. Sin embargo, como ya he mencionado, me he dado cuenta de que Open Floor aún necesita mostrar un entramado de posibilidades adicionales en este sentido. Es, entre otros, relevante en relación con lo que Lori y yo, hacia el final de nuestra entrevista, hemos discutido como el esfuerzo aún no completamente surgido de la “justicia social encarnada”. Se relaciona con cómo Open Floor puede también volverse más auténticamente inclusivo para una diversidad más amplia de individuos y grupos, convirtiéndose en un participante afirmativo dentro de un proceso de cambio ‘interno-externo’ que no sólo es relevante para lo ‘interno’ de Open Floor sino también para los contextos y sociedades más amplios en los que se inserta Open Floor. Por lo tanto, he enfatizado un proceso *(re)conectivo* de transformación honesta, compasiva y relacional, subrayando cómo nosotros en Open Floor debemos atrevernos a explorar nuestras propias vidas encarnadas de diversas inclusiones y exclusiones de maneras que tengan *ambos* los recursos y el coraje suficiente para que la transformación puede ocurrir. En este sentido, el aspecto de Open Floor como una práctica *facilitada* que puede ayudar a desdoblar *tanto* seguridad/confianza *como* novedad/expansión, así como Open Floor como una práctica que está abierta al cambio continuo a través, entre otros, de su *estructura organizacional dinámica*, *(re)emergen* como vital.

En este sentido, a partir de esta exploración multifacética, he llegado a una expresión concluyente de esta investigación que gira en torno a un *(re)involucración* de la totalidad

encarnada tanto ‘dentro’ como ‘fuera’, así como una danza transformadora de *(re)conexión* que permite a uno reconocer afirmativamente y comprometerse con esta totalidad que (ya) *es*. En este respecto, es un esfuerzo vivido de la totalidad y la *(re)conexión* que danza simultáneamente 'hacia adentro' y 'hacia afuera' - hacia *(re)conexiones* 'internas' con las expresiones personales de la totalidad de cada uno y hacia *(re)conexiones* 'externas' con las expresiones interconectadas de totalidad del entorno - pero que simultáneamente también se expande más allá de este ‘hacia adentro’ y ‘hacia afuera’ para tocar directamente la vibrante danza de la vida misma. Como tal, si voy a dar una respuesta general, aunque imperfecta, a mi pregunta principal de investigación: *¿de qué maneras puede el Open Floor ayudar a desdoblar las paces encarnadas?* - destacaría el potencial de Open Floor para, de maneras diversas y multifacéticas, ayudar continuamente a cultivar, facilitar y hacer posible una experiencia encarnada y una involucración afirmativa con esta danza continua de totalidad que uno mismo, los demás y la vida (ya) *son*. De esta manera, Open Floor puede, a través de sus numerosos movimientos, exploraciones, recursos y herramientas encarnados-relacionales, ayudar a individuos y colectivos a entrar en contacto nuevo y diferente, reconocer y realizar esta danza continua de totalidad, así como dinámicamente seguir explorando, afirmando y involucrarse con este tejido de totalidad a medida que continuamente se vuelve nuevo y diferente. Dicho de otra manera, Open Floor puede ayudar a individuos y colectivos a encarnar y afirmar más de lo que ellos y los demás *son*, así como más de lo que ellos y los demás constantemente también pueden llegar a ser.

Sin embargo, reconozco cómo esta danza afirmativa de totalidad ‘dentro’ y ‘fuera’ no puede desdoblarse verdaderamente transformadora si no logra darse cuenta auténticamente de la red interpenetrante de interser de la que todos somos continuamente parte. Por lo tanto, Open Floor tampoco puede ayudar a desdoblar paces encarnadas si las danzas *(re)conectivas* de la totalidad que la ayuda a cultivar son las llamadas ‘danzas exclusivas de la totalidad’,

cuya atención y cuidado se detienen en los bordes de nuestras pistas de baile únicamente. Más bien, debemos manifestar atención y cuidado hacia nuestras coexistencias interconectadas, reconociendo cómo “en última instancia, la calidad de nuestra vida depende de la calidad de vida de los demás (Lederach 2005: 35).” Como lo expresa hooks: “una ética del amor presupone que todo el mundo tiene derecho a ser libre, a vivir plena y bien (hooks 2001: 87).” Por lo tanto, también defiende una expansión y una transformación continua de Open Floor, encontrando constantemente formas nuevas y diferentes de desdoblar nuevas posibilidades. En este contexto, sostengo que somos nosotros, los maestros y practicantes que *somos* Open Floor, quienes debemos comprometernos a seguir manifestando las clases y los workshops que facilitamos y/o en los que participamos como espacios transformadores que pueden ayudar a co-emergir procesos afirmativos de cambio.

Este último aspecto también llama mi atención hacia cuáles son las posibles líneas de investigación adicionales en relación con esta investigación. No he buscado proporcionar una imagen universal y abarcadora de las paces, sino que he proporcionado una investigación inicial en un territorio hasta ahora en gran medida inexplorado para la academia en general y la investigación para las paces en particular. Por lo tanto, he explorado cómo Open Floor puede ayudar a desdoblar paces encarnadas particularmente relacionadas con la herencia onto-epistemológica de inspiración cartesiana 'incorpórea' en la que estoy/he estado incrustada. No he explorado entonces, como ejemplo, cómo Open Floor puede (o no puede) usarse como una herramienta concreta para la transformación de conflictos en un contexto conflictivo específico. Además, no he involucrado todas las experiencias y relaciones potenciales con Open Floor que existen - ¿cómo podría? - ya que me he centrado en las experiencias vividas que los maestros de Open Floor que he entrevistado han compartido conmigo, así como en cómo estas experiencias han resonado con mis maneras personales de ser, llegar a ser, conocer y relacionarme. Propongo en este sentido que una posible línea de

investigación adicional puede ser llevar Open Floor a diferentes contextos, involucrar a diferentes individuos y grupos, así como explorar experiencias diferentes a las que me he involucrado actualmente. Sostengo que esto también puede ser una manera de ayudar a que Open Floor surja como un espacio más significativamente relevante y auténticamente inclusivo para una diversidad más amplia de individuos y grupos. Sin embargo, si debo resaltar una línea específica de investigación que actualmente despierta mi curiosidad, enfatizo el potencial de Open Floor para también ayudar a cultivar (re)conexiones encarnadas y relaciones pacíficas con y como nuestro hogar planetario compartido y las múltiples expresiones de vida que implica este hogar planetario. A nivel personal, sostengo que esta danza más-que-humana de (re)conexión y la totalidad encarnada emerge como urgentemente relevante y esencial en relación con nuestras danzas de paces encarnadas en curso - individuales y compartidas.

Con esto, estoy al borde de un ciclo de investigación, habiendo llegado al movimiento final de calma y exhalación profunda hacia el momento lleno de quietud. Sin embargo, esta quietud está lejos de ser una abrupta interrupción del movimiento y una rígida parada en la nada, sino una suave llegada a la continuación encarnada que es mi vida. En este sentido, he desdoblado un proceso de investigación que he sentido auténticamente relevante y significativo para mi existencia personal. Al mismo tiempo, ha sido inmensamente difícil debido a que coincidió con la pérdida más grande y dolorosa de mi vida: la desaparición continua en la demencia y el eventual fallecimiento de mi padre. Por lo tanto, debo subrayar que a lo largo de este proceso de investigación tampoco me han faltado motivos para abandonarla antes de su finalización. Sin embargo, decidí no hacerlo. Ha habido algo más profundo que me ha mantenido bailando. ¿Qué es lo que me ha mantenido comprometida de esta manera, incluso en los momentos más oscuros de mi dolor más severo? Creo que este ‘eso’ es el amor. Es el amor que está dirigido hacia mí misma, el amor que siempre llevaré

por mi padre, el amor que comparto con mi familia y mis amigos, el amor que me mantiene comprometida con la vida, el amor que he conocido - en un sentido profundo de nivel encarnado - cómo he *necesitado* completar esta investigación porque es una expresión significativa de, exactamente, el amor tal como elijo ofrecerlo al mundo. Por lo tanto, estoy llegando a esta continuación encarnada que es mi vida, manifestando la exhalación y el asentamiento en el momento lleno de quietud, con esta importante percepción incrustada en mi ser: cualquier cosa que encuentre, cualquier cosa que baile, he llegado a un lugar donde sé - en un nivel profundo y encarnado - cómo siempre puedo acceder a este amor y elegir hacer que dirija y guíe mis movimientos porque sé - en un nivel profundo y encarnado - que si he logrado hacer que este amor me guíe y dirigir mis movimientos a través del completamente salvaje e insoportable Invierno del Dolor, también puedo hacer que guíe y dirija mis movimientos a través de cualquier cosa y como sea que pueda encontrarme con el baile de mi vida próximamente. Esta involucración con y la conciencia del amor es, por lo tanto, la idea principal con la que dejo este proceso de investigación encarnado.

## Introduction

This research is titled *Unfolding Embodied Peaces through Dance and Movement. Open Floor Conscious Dance and Movement Practice as a Transrational Resource for Peace*. It explores the research question: *in which ways can Open Floor help unfold embodied peaces?* Already here, several questions arise. What is a *transrational* peace resource and what are *embodied peaces* (in plural)? Which type of *practice* is *Open Floor* and what does it mean to be a *conscious dance and movement* practice? I engage these questions in turn. They are core inquiries for the research and their answers help evolve an exploration that wonders deeply into both meanings and experiences of peace. In which multiple ways, embodied and/or ‘disembodied’, can peace be understood and lived? How do understandings of peace co-create how peace is unfolded - and vice versa? These are some of the many questions that I dive into and explore throughout the research journey.

I engage in this respect a multilayered web of *embodied peaces* in this inquiry. I do it through exploring the conscious dance and movement practice that I both practice and teach: *Open Floor*. I begin however from the seemingly ‘opposite’ field, engaging so-called ‘disembodied’ dynamics that move ‘within’ and ‘around’. I hence commence from a Cartesian splitting between ‘body’ and ‘mind’, which I understand to be a lived onto-epistemological heritage that is still alive and influential in many current contexts. It includes many of the contexts that I am embedded within. The term onto-epistemologies points towards how being (ontologies) and knowing (epistemologies) are deeply entangled, thus underlining how the ways that one knows and what one (can) know(s) continuously co-create (Barad 2007, Escobar 2020). Moreover, onto-epistemologies constantly (re)produce ethics, making every onto-epistemological engagement always also an ethical one (see also Lehner 2022, Palmer 1993). I seek in this context to engage a holistic process of knowing in this



research, purposefully exploring, understanding, and transforming ‘disembodied’ ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating through intentionally (re)engaging embodied ones.

### **The Key Aspects of the Research**

My research is in this sense a multidimensional exploration into a lived and dynamic fabric of living that cannot always be straightforwardly explained, understood, or described. Nevertheless, it can be engaged, listened to, and felt in embodied and pluralistic ways. In this respect, I start by providing a founding overview as regards the key aspects that the research concerns, guiding with this the reader towards a deeper understanding through a basic outline and founding description of what the research is about.

When it comes to the **personal motivations** for why I have chosen my research focus, I highlight a felt and embodied need within my personal existence - as well as, I add, within much of my lived surroundings - which concerns a (re)engagement of wholeness rather than a (un)conscious splitting of life into ‘separate and incompatible parts’. What I mean by this can perhaps best be approached by looking at what Zen Buddhist teacher and graduate of physiological psychology with a special focus on chronic pain, Darlene Cohen, expresses related to a lived (re)connection with wholeness: “our being alive for the mundane chaos of our lives (Cohen in Friedman and Moon 1997: 16).” She writes: “this connection - to the earth, our bodies, our sense impressions, our creative energies, our feelings, other people - is the only way I know of to alleviate suffering (Cohen in Friedman and Moon 1997: 16).” I furthermore underline how this embodied (re)connection is ultimately the most impactful and meaningful way that I personally know of to experience, work for, help manifest, and co-create peaces. I therefore explore this embodied web of (re)connection in this research, trying to deeper understand ways in which this (re)connection can be elicited, unfolded, and lived.

I begin in this regard, moving to the core of my **research structure**, by investigating how a so-called ‘disembodied’ and Cartesian-inspired onto-epistemological heritage that I

am/have been embedded within - which can also be called a ‘Western’ onto-epistemological heritage - simultaneously influences and is influenced by how I and others are, become, know, and relate. Out of this, I explore how new and different possibilities for embodied being, becoming, knowing, and relating can potentially (re)emerge. This latter process of (new) embodied possibilities, I noticeably engage through exploring the above-mentioned conscious dance and movement practice that I practice and teach: Open Floor. I thus look into, first, how ‘disembodied’ ways of thinking the human process and the fabric of peaces co-shape how the human process and the fabric of peaces are experienced and lived. Second, I engage Open Floor to explore how new and different embodied possibilities can (re)unfold. The inquiry hence centers around the intimate relations that arise between ways of *thinking, experiencing, knowing, being, doing, and relating* with peaces, with oneself, and with one’s surroundings. In other words, the beautifully complex process of unfolding peaces as a multifaceted embodied whole.

A vital **academic justification** behind this choice of research focus centers around the key awareness regarding how metaphorical visions and onto-epistemological understandings that we as humans, individually and collectively, (un)consciously live by are not only thought phenomena but embodied processes that permeate being, becoming, knowing, and relating. Said in the words of British moral philosopher Mary Midgley, onto-epistemological imagery “affects the whole of life. Our ideas about our place in the world pervade all our thought, along with the imagery that expresses them, constantly determining what questions we ask and what answers can seem possible. They enter into all our decision-making (Midgley 2001: 239).” In this line, I contend how one of the most meaningful contributions that I - as a ‘Western’ researcher who is embedded within a ‘Western’ context - can do, is to dare grapple with and engage my own lived (onto-epistemological) realities as means to contribute to potential transformation and further (embodied) peace possibilities. Nevertheless, I underline

how this embodied (re)engagement need to happen through a process that is, precisely, embodied (as well as relational), thus not only thinking about embodiment but living embodiment through a field that is authentically felt and engaged. In this regard, Open Floor as a concrete resource and tool for embodied transformation emerges in my understanding as a highly relevant practice to explore.

I emphasize with this how the main **research objective** that drives this research inquiry is not about either proving or disproving a research hypothesis. Rather, it radiates out of the aim to qualitatively describe, deeper understand, and meaningfully emphasize different ways in which a practice such as Open Floor can help unfold new and different peace possibilities. It is especially, yet not exclusively, relevant related to a so-called ‘Western’ and Cartesian-inspired onto-epistemological context. As such, my core research objective is to deeper understand and meaningfully describe different dynamics and processes involved in *how* Open Floor can help unfold an embodied peace web. My **research question** therefore reads: *in which ways can Open Floor help unfold embodied peaces?* On a more specific level, it includes to empathically explore and compassionately understand the possible reasons that move behind a ‘disembodied’ tendency to ‘think oneself apart’, as well as to relationally investigate ways in which practicing Open Floor has (or has not) unfolded embodied transformation and change in the lives of longer-term Open Floor practitioners.

I understand in this respect embodied peaces to evolve as a lived fabric of peaces that radiates out of a wholeness-oriented and dynamic affirmation of the ever-unfolding web of embodied being, becoming, knowing, and relating underlined. Embodied peaces are therefore holistic, relational, interconnected, and, obviously, embodied, yet also imperfect, contradictory, paradoxical, ever-transforming, multifaceted, and contextualized. In this context, I build amongst others upon a *transrational peace philosophy* (Dietrich 2012, 2013, 2018, Dietrich et al. 2014, Echavarría Alvarez et al. 2018, Koppensteiner 2020) as a founding

**academic framework** in this research, which I do to contend how embodied peaces are never a static end-state or a perfect ‘One Truth’ but an ongoing, often paradoxical, and always imperfect (Muñoz 2006) dance of multiplicity that manifests new and different peaces - dynamic equilibriums - on an ongoing basis as manifold conflicts and homeostatic imbalances are engaged and transformed. As such, the art and practice of embodied peaces emerge as a procedural engagement of one’s own and others’ wholeness as creative resources in the imperfect and relational endeavor of, as Austrian peace researcher and founder of transrational peace philosophy Wolfgang Dietrich (2012, 2013, 2018) might put it, constantly *eliciting the many possible peaces* (see also Lederach 1995). I am in this regard especially guided by the following ‘key transrational words’: *both-and, transformation, dynamic equilibriums/homeostasis, eliciting, unfolding, correspondence, relationality, encounter*.

Important to emphasize furthermore, I focus mainly upon a human process of peaces in this research. It does not mean that I exclude more-than-human processes from the fabric of peaces, as I rather understand ‘human’ and ‘more-than-human’ to deeply interconnect. I thus honor a profound wisdom of interconnectedness that can, amongst others, be found in indigenous perspectives (Stewart-Harawira 2012, Horsley in Dietrich et al. 2014: 293-414, Four Arrows 2020, see also Barad 2007, Abram 1996). Columbian American anthropologist and decolonial scholar Arturo Escobar puts it in relation to the Zapatista notion ‘a world in which many worlds might fit’ - the pluriverse - as such: “the world is (...) a web formed of interwoven lines and threads, always in motion. We humans are, like all other living creatures, immersed in this web (Escobar 2020: 26).” To embody a human experience, therefore, is never only a human experience but a lived participation in a larger fabric of life.

Nevertheless, since I am starting from a ‘disembodied’ idea of peaces in this research - a idea that does *not* understand the human dance to be interwoven within a larger web of being, becoming, knowing, and relating - I realize how I need to start from how this

differentiated process that we tend to call human can itself be thought, lived, and unfolded differently. I therefore commence from a personally lived experience of dancing an embodied dance that has - through amongst others the onto-epistemological frames that I am/have been embedded within - often been engaged as the seemingly ‘opposite’ of embodied living; as static, as anthropocentric, as purely rational, as linear, as one-dimensional, as strictly individual. Out of this, I explore widened ways to re-think, re-engage, and continuously transform this dance into a wholeness-oriented web of interconnectedness and plurality anew. On the way, I am helped by the lived experiences of seven other long-term Open Floor practitioners (teachers) who have generously shared their dance and movement experiences with me. I apply in this sense narrative inquiry as the main **methodological choice** for this inquiry, conducting in-depth, qualitative, and narrative interviews. I thus unfold a relational dance of insights that offers a personal and more-than-personal exploration into an embodied web of living that, if pertinent, can be resonated with and inspired from by other individuals and collectives in both familiar and unfamiliar ways. For peace research, this move towards the personally lived is highly valuable because this move itself, I affirm, already manifests transformative potentials as regards the ‘disembodied’ onto-epistemological heritage that I explore. In this line, I consciously also include myself as an embedded researcher within the research process, tapping into my personal closeness to the topic and to the Open Floor practice as a resource rather than merely/primarily a bias for the research exploration.

### **On my ‘Western’ Embodied Perspective as a Researcher - and Why it Matters**

To help explain my latter statements in more depth, I emphasize how I do not intend to provide a universal and all-encompassing picture of peaces in this inquiry. It would neither be possible nor fruitful as regards my research intentions. Instead, I aim to explore a lived web of peaces that radiates out of and through my own situated perspective, yet that also includes the lived perspectives of other long-term Open Floor practitioners (teachers) through their

generous sharing with me during the narrative interview encounters that we have co-engaged. The inquiry therefore *starts* from some deeply held assumptions about what peaces can and cannot be that have shaped my relations to peaces throughout my life, making the unique embodied perspective that I am researching out of crucial to acknowledge and engage.

The perspective that I am researching out of is the perspective of white, Norwegian woman who, as of 2020, is in her early thirties and who has been highly influenced by ‘disembodied’ onto-epistemological dynamics within her life. Furthermore, it is the perspective of a neurotypical, able-bodied, and heterosexual woman who is married with a Pakistani citizen, who does not (yet) have any children, who is not identified with any specific religion, and who come from what might be characterized as an upper-middle class background even though she has been deeply shaped by the ways that her father brought his working class background into his co-raising of her siblings and her. Additionally, she is the second person and first woman (her father is the other) to work towards a PhD in her family, yet she is the first one to proceed within social sciences/humanities rather than in technical subjects. She therefore at times struggles to feel at home in this social sciences/humanities world of academics that she has entered, lacking a grounding sense of familiarity with this world and its discourses from her upbringing and roots. Considering my research, the broader situation that I am researching out of can therefore perhaps best be described as ‘Western’. Yet, what this ‘Western’ includes and does not include involves a vital questioning of the seemingly ‘visible’ and ‘clear’ lines that are often drawn between ‘Western’ and the awkwardly named ‘non-Western’ (Mohanty 1984), as well as of the tendency to place oneself within one defining category alone. I therefore ask: is ‘Western’ a useful category to help situate this research within a sufficiently descriptive, although broadly defined context?

To provide an incomplete answer to this question, I (re)emphasize how the context that I am researching out of is of course never only a ‘Western’ context alone. Rather, it

unfolds through a diverse web of life experiences that I have emerged as a woman, as a Norwegian, as a ‘Westerner’, as a traveler, as a theatre, dance, and yoga practitioner and teacher, as a lover of forests and mountains, as a daughter of two civil engineers, as a caring sister, as a loving daughter, as a curious soul, as a wife, as part of my Pakistani family-in-law, as a devotee of deep questions and their many possible answers, as well as others. The lived perspective that I am researching out of is therefore a diverse coming together of more than 30 years of embodied life. How does the relevant, yet not exclusive category of ‘Western’ move within this multifaceted landscape that I am?

I underline in this respect how I intend to explore and engage the embodied dance of life as well as its many possible peaces as a multifaceted and paradoxical fabric in this inquiry. It therefore includes countless in-betweens and multiple both-and. In a similar vein, I approach neither myself nor my embodied positionings in the world as a neatly organized quest of linearity but involve how I am at the same time a ‘Western’ (Norwegian) researcher who researches out of her ‘Western’ (Norwegian) perspective, and who is, potentially, researching questions and dynamics of peaces that are particularly pertinent in this so-called ‘Western’ (Norwegian) context that I live. At the same time, I am the so-much-more of what my life have included until now and what it might possibly include in the future. The web of peaces that I am researching similarly unfolds as a multilayered dance that is full of both-and and that unfolds situated *and* capable of moving beyond this situatedness at the same time. It is moreover a dance that at times dissolves categories and words altogether, leaning into the ineffable breath of the moment where all I am is exactly that: a dance.

I honor and include with this a manifold web of embodied being, becoming, knowing, and relating in this research, seeing the complexity that the multiplicity unfolds as a life-affirming inclusion that helps deepen my understandings and engagements. I therefore involve a *paradoxical both-and*, which is amongst others inspired from what Jennifer

Murphy - a US-based interdisciplinary peace researcher who applies postcolonial, feminist, intersectional, and transrational lenses - frames as the importance of asking two seemingly opposite yet equally valid and interrelated questions:

how do I avoid flattening out this complex topographic terrain [of categories, identities, and dynamics of privilege, exclusion/inclusion, and power that we all are part of] so I do not become color-blind, gender-blind and class-blind (among other realms of blindness)? How might these very categories of 'race,' gender and class prevent the learning community from recognizing its radical interrelatedness and interconnectedness (Murphy in Echavarría Alvarez et al. 2018: 279)?

For me, this capacity to ask a similar web of both-and questions is an ethical and epistemological choice to the research that helps me offer it as an exploratory venture into some deeply lived dynamics of being alive while being humbly aware of how the answers that I encounter cannot and will not resonate with and be relevant for all individuals and collectives in the same or even similar way. I find this essential because I - returning with this to why a move towards the personally lived is highly valuable for peace research - acknowledge and engage how the 'disembodied' onto-epistemological heritage that I explore can also not, I affirm, be seen apart from how this heritage keeps (re)producing multiple structures of harm that often intersect in various ways (see Crenshaw 1989, Johnson 2017, Escobar 2020, Mignolo and Walsh 2018, Midgley 2001, Väyrynen et al. 2021, Combahee River Collective Statement 1977 quoted from Taylor 2017, Weber in Echavarría et al. 2018, Anzaldúa 2015, Four Arrows 2020, hooks 1984). It includes diverse structural inequalities and 'Western'-centric approaches that (un)consciously move in peace research (Kester and Cremin 2017, París Albert and Comins Mingol 2013, Weber in Echavarría Alvarez et al. 2018, Cremin et al. 2018), in Open Floor and the broader field of conscious dance and movement to which Open Floor belongs (Tjersland and Borovica 2021), as well as in the humanistic and transpersonal approaches to psychology that both Open Floor and the transrational peace philosophy that I lean upon gather much inspiration from (Sohmer 2020a, Goldman 2012, Puttick 2000).



Antiracist researcher Mahdis Azarmandi argues in this respect how peace research often tends to be about contexts in the Global South while researchers themselves are from and located in contexts of the Global North. This detaches, according to Azarmandi, “the researcher both geographically as well as discursively from where violence is understood to be taking place (Azarmandi 2018: 70),” delinking “the researchers’ position from structures that uphold and maintain violence (Azarmandi 2018: 70).” I importantly consider this a violent and ‘disembodied’ colonial condition that keeps allowing researchers from the Global North - such as myself - to ‘avoid’ our relational implications (Rothberg 2019) within structures of harm, ‘rendering us free’ to focus upon the violence understood to happening with and by only ‘others’ instead. As a small way to counter this colonial imbalance, I purposefully move the other direction in this research, explicitly exploring a lived web of peaces (and conflicts) that I am myself embedded within.

I build in this sense, amongst others, upon decolonial scholars Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh (2018) to argue how the ‘disembodied’ onto-epistemological heritage that I explore cannot be seen apart from a *colonial matrix of power*. It is a concept engaged in especially Latin American decolonial theory, building from Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano’s (2007) ‘coloniality of power’. In the context of this research, it helps bring attention to an (un)conscious ‘interlocking system of oppression’ (Combahee River Collective Statement 1977 quoted from Taylor 2017: 15), which interconnects with a ‘Western’ capitalist system of power and its (un)conscious claim to a ‘disembodied’ and ‘universal’ onto-epistemological ‘Truth’. This ‘Truth’, furthermore, (re)produces a hierarchy of intersectional binaries that tends to value ‘white’, ‘man’, ‘human’, ‘modern/civilized’, ‘European’, ‘mind’, ‘straight’, ‘able’, ‘rational’, ‘neurotypical’, ‘financially productive’, and more, over ‘colored/indigenous/black’, ‘woman’, ‘nature’, ‘emotional/sensuous/intuitive’, ‘non-European’, ‘traditional’, ‘disabled’, ‘body’, ‘queer’, ‘neurodivergent’ - amongst other

categories. Ultimately hence, it is a (un)conscious hierarchical structure that reduces our multifaceted and interconnected embodied existences into separating ‘either-ors’ as well as disconnecting ‘us vs. them’ (see also Menakem 2021, Kaur 2022, Selassie 2020). In this regard, Mignolo and Walsh argue how a decolonial (and, I add, embodied) transformation can amongst others emerge through a practice of *epistemic disobedience* - a de-linking from the universalist claim of this ‘Western’ onto-epistemological ‘Truth’ (Mignolo 2009: 160) - “to undermine the mechanisms that keeps it [the colonial matrix of power] in place (...) (Mignolo in Mignolo and Walsh 2018: 114).” This, I underline, is an essential practice to be aware of when it comes to the embodied-oriented focus of this research inquiry.

Even though I with this center the core of my research around an embodied engagement with lived, relational processes of transformation - unfolded, amongst others, by the Open Floor teachers who I have encountered through the in-depth, qualitative, and narrative interviews that I have engaged - I emphasize how this underlying awareness of multiple structural realities and (un)conscious systems of power is key as I investigate Open Floor to engage new and different potentials for embodied (co)being, (co)becoming, (co)knowing, and (co)relating. I consider how this awareness can help serve as a basic ground of recognition regarding how our many-faceted existences continuously intertwine, unfolding personal ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating as impactful and influential also when it comes to larger, collective manners - as well as vice versa. As such, one is never an isolated experience but an interconnected process of co-creation. In this context, a meaningful contribution of my research is to emerge a potentially transformative space of tensions where new and different possibilities for embodied (co)being, (co)becoming, (co)knowing, and (co)relating can (re)manifest through and between my so-called ‘Western’ embodied positioning *and* my lived efforts to challenge and transform this ‘Western’ hegemony in, exactly, epistemologically ‘disobedient’ ways. I hence agree with

US American scholar/activist, somatic movement therapist, and queer-identified social worker Rae Johnson in that “reclaiming the felt experience of [our bodies] is [also] a political act (...) (Johnson, R 2018: 131).” My research is therefore *both* a political *and* a personal endeavor, yet the focus lies on lived, embodied potentials for relational transformation. In this respect, I find it vital to also engage some of my personal encounters with peaces (and unpeaces) throughout my life, highlighting with this the deeply personal engagement and commitment that I approach this research with.

### **Peaces (and Unpeaces) from the Life of a Researcher**

As a child, teenager, and young adult, I have always been immensely fascinated by the process of encountering deeper understandings and interconnections between phenomena. Although I was not always consciously aware of the systematic nature of learning, my curiosity was deeply and authentically felt. I thrived when I was challenged to encounter new understandings by searching for dynamics yet to be fully revealed. I keenly immersed myself in the endeavor of discovering novel patterns and ways of interconnection. Still today, it is the yet-to-be-fully-understood that inspires me to creatively and meaningfully engage. In this respect, Austrian peace researcher Norbert Koppensteiner proposes to, as a minimum, understand research as “the systematic and creative inquiry into a concrete topic in order to gain knowledge (Koppensteiner in Echavarría Alvarez et al. 2018: 60)”. In many ways, therefore, I guess I have been a researcher far longer than I have been naming myself as such.

My enthusiasm for encountering new understandings and interconnections between phenomena was also what brought me into the field of peace research. When I first entered this research discipline, I came with a deep, (un)conscious longing towards better grasping how I and others could encounter more authentic sensations of peaces ‘within’ ourselves. It was driven by a profound need to make sense of some hugely influential life experiences, which concern how I - as a child, teenager, and young adult - have witnessed several painful

‘inner’ struggles in people very close to me. In the medical language, these struggles have been given names such as depression, anxiety, psychosis, paranoia, dementia, and schizophrenia. For me, they have been my beloved family members struggling to encounter the peaces ‘within’ that I ached for them to unfold. As a daughter and sister, I have furthermore felt how my own ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating have been continuously co-shaped by these ‘inner’ pains that I have witnessed around. I have struggled to encounter peaces ‘within’ myself as a consequence. My passion as a peace researcher, therefore, is in many ways fueled by a core curiosity towards these so-called ‘inner’ sensations of peaces. Nevertheless, I have come to understand how the ‘inner’ is never separate from the ‘outer’ and how ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ cannot be seen apart from each other. I am for example a living, breathing manifestation myself for how these two realms of being correspond. My ‘inner’ peaces constantly co-shape how I relate to my surroundings; the peaces ‘around’ continuously inform my ‘inner’ peace dance.

US American humanist psychologist and founder of Gestalt Therapy Fritz Perls (1973) describes in this regard humans as *contact boundaries at work*. It is a term that emphasizes the art of being human as a constant movement within and between relations, including ‘inner’ relations with oneself and ‘outer’ relations with one’s human and more-than-human surroundings. These two fields of relationality furthermore co-interact, emerging in line with an ancient, energetic principle of *correspondence*. This principle can be found in variations throughout histories and cultures, including in yogic, tantric, and alchemist forms (Koppensteiner 2020: 6). It brings attention to how ‘what moves within also moves without’; ‘what moves without also moves within’. It therefore underlines how the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ are dynamically co-unfolding, mirroring the words of US American humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers in that “what is most personal and unique in each one of us is probably the very element which would, if it were shared or expressed, speak most deeply to

others (Rogers 1961: 26).” In the context of this research, it helps bring attention to how humans are always relational and how the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ are *both* unique, qualitatively different expressions of embodied relationality *and* never truly separated. I therefore also use the term ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ - with inverted commas - during my discussion to emphasize this simultaneous uniqueness and togetherness. I am in this sense particularly interested to explore how the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ can both *support* each other in the unfolding of peaces and, on the other hand, *block* transformations from happening.

In relation to the transrational peace philosophy, Dietrich underlines how the principle of correspondence can help highlight how peaces (and conflicts) can be approached from two and even simultaneous sides, beginning “in and with personal as well as relational layers (Dietrich 2014: 55).” This is because “every change of external affairs and relations has an impact on the internal condition of the people involved - and vice versa (Dietrich 2014: 55).” Nevertheless, this ‘inner-outer’ web of correspondence manifests in multifaceted rather than in one-dimensional manners, thus emerging dynamics that are expected *and* unexpected, familiar *and* unfamiliar. German feminist peace scholar Annette Weber argues in this context how the transrational peace philosophy can also fall into the trap of emerging an (un)conscious universalist approach if it is not also critically engaged (Weber in Echavarría Alvarez et al. 2018: 93-94, 102-103). I therefore emphasize how I do not assume correspondence to be a universal ‘Truth’ but see it as a principle that highlights resonance and transpersonality as meaningful potentials within an embodied process of life. I am hence aware of how I can never have full access into another being’s experience (Weber in Echavarría Alvarez et al. 2018: 94), and how my research can therefore only remain partial and contextualized. As emphasized, however, it is precisely this lived embeddedness that allows me to - if humbly and critically engaged - offer my research as a meaningful exploration into an embodied process of life.

To from here situate myself more specifically in space and time: I am born a dark and wintery December day in 1988 in Trondheim, which is the third biggest city in Norway. I entered the world as the always very healthy - and, I have heard, also happily well fed - first joint child of my two parents. Both my parents had however been married before they met each other, and they also both had children from their previous marriages. I therefore came to life with three older siblings to expect my arrival already. Two of them came from my father and the third one from my mother. Four years after my birth, moreover, my younger brother was also born, and my quite so 'modern' family constellation was with this complete.

I am in this sense fortunate enough to be born into a society, family, culture, time, and space that offered me a very so-called 'peaceful' start in life. I have for example never experienced direct war, economic hardship, or been particularly limited into narrow gender roles while growing up. Peaces, thus, should be a second nature to me. In reality, however, it was not the case. I did instead, as mentioned, experience and witness several 'inner' struggles in people very close to me and unfolded painful 'inner' struggles myself as a consequence. It has therefore become clearer and clearer to me how also in so-called 'peaceful' societies, such as Norway, there are peaces and unpeaces that live side by side. Norway, like everywhere, consists of joys and sufferings, struggles and pleasures, peaces and conflicts: the ups and downs of being alive. Particularly, I have realized how deep and painful struggles can be alive on the 'inside' even if everything seems to be 'perfectly peaceful' 'outside'.

I have in this respect, out of these influential life experiences of mine, become curious to deeper understand what might contribute to this seeming discrepancy between 'inner' and 'outer'. My search for answers has brought me towards some crucial interconnections that co-create between ways of *thinking* and ways of *experiencing*, especially as it concerns influential, 'disembodied' onto-epistemological frames. Said differently, I have come to realize how a core ingredient in my own process of unfolding more authentic sensations of

peaces is to find ways to relate to my so-called ‘body’ and my so-called ‘mind’ more fruitfully as an integrated whole. Nevertheless, the largely ‘disembodied’ onto-epistemological frames that I am/have been embedded within have made it difficult for me to embrace my embodied wholeness this way. In this respect, I emphasize one the most famous statements that has been made in the history of European Enlightenment.

In 1637, French philosopher René Descartes announced ‘*cogito ergo sum*’ (I think, therefore I am) (Descartes 2017a: 25). Together with the rest of his argument, this well-known sentence helped pave the way for a deep splitting between ‘body’ and ‘mind’ - material and immaterial - that is still influential in conscious and unconscious manners in especially yet not exclusively ‘Western’ onto-epistemologies today. Descartes helped in this sense elevate conscious and rational thinking as the seemingly only ‘true’ essence of what it means to be a human whole while all other interconnected processes of embodied wholeness got (un)consciously devalued. ‘Body’, thus, got depreciated as a limitation rather than a resource for the human dance (Tjersland 2019).

I thence concluded that I was a substance whose whole essence or nature consists only in thinking, and which, that it may exist, has need of no place, nor is dependent on any material thing; so that ‘I’, that is to say, the mind by which I am what I am, is wholly distinct from the body (...) (Descartes 2017a: 25).

Although these Cartesian ideas have been deconstructed and criticized by numerous scholars since then (Midgley 2001, Lakoff and Johnson 1999, Sheets-Johnstone 1999, Damasio 1994) - and although it can also be argued how and to which degree Descartes’ philosophies were indeed fully ‘disembodied’ (see Hutchins et al. 2016, Kirkebøen 2001) - I argue how the lived implications that this Cartesian ‘mind-body’ split has helped manifest are by no means made irrelevant. On the contrary, it is a ‘disembodied’ heritage that still helps shape how many individuals and collectives (un)consciously relate with themselves and their surroundings. For example, as a person grown up within ‘Western’ sociocultural frames, I carry a substantial load of ‘disembodied’ influence. There has for example existed a

seemingly uncrossable ‘mind-body valley’ ‘within’ me for a long time, which has helped shaped how I have been able and not able to encounter both myself and my surroundings. It is amongst others visible in relation to how I have found it difficult to connect to my embodied wholeness, having (un)consciously believed that the most (and only) important ‘part’ of me is my rational ‘mind’. Out of this, I have struggled to authentically experience the embodied aliveness of my surroundings, often feeling lonely and lost because I have longed for embodied connections yet been unable to unfold them through the onto-epistemological frames that I lived by. Even though I do not resonate with these ‘disembodied’ ideas on a factual level hence, I have *felt* how it is possible to ‘think oneself apart’. Exactly because I am *not* a separated ‘mind’ and ‘body’ but an integrated whole, I have *lived* this mind-body split far beyond my ways of thinking. What are some of the dynamics that has made this possible?

US American clinical professor of psychiatry Daniel J. Siegel argues how humans understand and experience themselves and the world through an integrated two-directional flow. Humans thus make meaning *both* through a bottom-up flow of information that unfolds from embodied experience *and* through a top-down flow of ‘mental’ information where categorizing, planning, and associating capacities create meaning out of language, learning, ideas, and perceived connections between phenomena (Siegel 2011: 200-203). Importantly, both these flows of information are necessary, they happen at the same time, and they continuously co-create and co-interact within an ever-transforming web.

In a similar vein, US American cognitive linguistics and philosophers George Lakoff and Mark Johnson discuss how humans understand themselves and the world through (un)consciously applying metaphorical structures to the concepts that they engage. These metaphorical structures ‘hide and highlight’ diverse aspects and qualities of these concepts (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 10-13), co-shaping how individuals and collectives engage



themselves and their surroundings in relation to these concepts. For example, (un)consciously conceptualizing argument as war unfolds qualitatively different experiences and relations than (un)consciously conceptualizing argument as dance (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 4-5). These two structures therefore ‘hide and highlight’ different aspects of what ‘argument’ can and cannot be. According to Lakoff and Johnson, these metaphorical structures are ultimately unfolded out of and through embodied experience (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, Johnson 2007). They can thus be seen similarly to Siegel’s top-down processes. They are top-down meaning-making processes that co-interact and co-unfold with bottom-up embodied life. How one experiences oneself and the world are never separate from how one thinks oneself and the world - as well as vice versa.

My personal top-down and metaphorical meaning-making frames have in this sense often ‘hid’ for me the possibility to engage peace as an embodied reality. My frames of understanding have rather highlighted peace(s) as an abstract and ‘disembodied’ idea, making the ‘peace’ that I had the most easily access to a ‘peace’ that could not satisfy my deep longings for embodied connection and meaning. As such, the ‘peace’ that I have engaged have not been felt as peace at all, but as a lingering presence of *unpeace*. With it, I have harbored a desire for alternative ways, feeling my lack of embodied connections as immensely painful. Paradoxically therefore, it is my ‘pain of disembodiment’ that has moved me towards embodied transformations. It is my ‘inner Cartesian valley’ that has led me towards new and alternative possibilities. In the process, I have encountered a passion that currently fuels much of my creative engagements. It is the conscious dance and movement practice Open Floor, which I explore in this inquiry. Open Floor is a dance and movement practice that is often referred to as a *conscious dance and movement practice* in English. It is

however not the only term that is applied<sup>1</sup>, yet it is the term that, as of yet, is the most established and well-recognized within the field. I therefore stay with this term in this inquiry. In another text, I have defined my understanding of this term in relation to how I teach Open Floor as such:

as I work with it, ‘conscious’ refers to the key focus on embodied awareness of oneself and the surroundings during the practice that is highlighted in Open Floor, while ‘dance and movement’ refers to the main modality through which the work is being done - the body *in movement*. ‘Practice’ refers to the focus on creating a space where students can explore and engage with different dynamics again and again without having to be ‘right or wrong’ (Tjersland 2019. Emphasis in original).

What is particularly important to emphasize concerns in this regard how Open Floor is not a dance and movement practice that teaches fixed dance steps or choreographies. It is also not a performative practice that involves external audiences. Rather, Open Floor invites practitioners to encounter, express, expand, and engage their multifaceted dance and movement possibilities in an immediate and process-oriented manner. They are with this guided to explore what is present and what ‘wants to be moved’ within each new here and now. These explorations happen in a shared group space<sup>2</sup>, and one is therefore never an isolated individual during the Open Floor experience but moves and dances as an ‘inner-outer’ contact boundary at work. Dancers and movers are thus invited to mindfully engage their dancing and moving bodies together with others, bringing embodied attention towards, with, and through the multiple forms, expressions, and possibilities that they unfold. In this manner, they can practice listening to, familiarizing themselves with, and co-creating possibilities for their own and others continual unfolding of wholeness.

On a personal level, I graduated as an Open Floor teacher in 2018. I was at this point living in the middle of Europe - in Innsbruck, Austria - which allowed me to travel easily to

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<sup>1</sup> For example, several Open Floor teachers as well as Open Floor International (the organization behind the Open Floor practice) often use the phrase ‘mindful movement’, along with other variations.

<sup>2</sup> Some teachers also work with Open Floor in one-on-one therapeutic processes. This requires an additional training from Open Floor International, as well as previous qualifications as a therapist. I do not work with Open Floor in this manner and teach in group settings only. See also chapter 3.4 and footnote 77 in chapter 4.2.

attend the classes and trainings that I needed to complete the teacher-training program. The main part of the teacher-training took place outside of Montpellier, Southern France. I had furthermore, in 2018, only been engaging Open Floor for about two years. I had however studied and explored embodied practices since I was 14<sup>3</sup>. Open Floor was therefore not the first embodied modality that I practiced, yet there was something about Open Floor that profoundly resonated when I first danced. I felt like I *arrived*. I felt like I entered a space that deeply made sense as it guided me towards meaningful ways to dance my ‘inner-outer’ process always anew. It opened up multiple spaces where I could manifest new and different peaces by dynamically transforming through the dance. In this way, I could engage both myself and others in ways that kept affirming our wholeness. Open Floor is with this a practice that has helped me (re)discover, (re)embrace, and infinitely (re)create myself in continuous interactions with my surroundings. These creative movements have furthermore rested upon an embodied anchoring that has unfolded just enough safety for me to keep dancing these risky explorations into creative territories always again. Personally, it has been a combination of creativity and safety that I have deeply needed.

I am with this not claiming that Open Floor can transform all conflicts, unfold all peaces, or even that it is a practice that resonates with everyone. I am moreover not saying that all my transformations happened through Open Floor alone. I have rather, as of 2019, made embodied life experiences for more than thirty years. Open Floor has only been present for the last three of these years. Many of my transformations have therefore unfolded through other spaces and endeavors, such as travelling extensively, studying and practicing other embodied practices (see footnote 3), as well as being in love with mountains and forests. It is

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<sup>3</sup> The first embodied practice that I engaged was theatre, which I studied in high school, through my bachelor studies, and in a postgraduate teacher degree. Additionally, I am trained as a Vinyasa yoga teacher, and I also practice another conscious dance and movement practice called the 5Rhythms. 5Rhythms was in this sense created by Gabrielle Roth (1998a, 1998b) in California in the 1970’s. It is a practice that Open Floor owes much inspiration from, amongst others because all founders and founding members of Open Floor International (the organization behind Open Floor) are previously trained as 5Rhythms teachers. Nonetheless, 5Rhythms and Open Floor are different practices that work with different curriculums. See chapter 3.2 for more information.

nonetheless Open Floor that currently fuels my research curiosity. It is therefore Open Floor that I explore in this research. When I teach and practice Open Floor, I sense such a multitude of embodied potentials that I am profoundly eager to better understand. I want to better grasp how these potentials can be engaged to support others and myself in our ongoing unfolding of embodied peaces and wholeness. Personally, I sense these potentials so strongly that I am willing to dedicate years of my life towards exploring their dynamics. I am therefore deeply curious to better understand how I and others can consciously tap into Open Floor to help manifest a life-affirming web of wholeness - for ourselves, for each other, as well as for the living, breathing surroundings that we are all part of.

### **The Cycle of the Research**

As I with this move to outline the main structure of this inquiry, I emphasize how I organize my writings in line with a map that is embedded within the practice that I explore. It is a map that is called ‘the movement cycle’, which in Open Floor serves as a tool to help structure and understand the different processes of a class/workshop. Similarly, I use the movement cycle to deeper understand and structure the smaller and larger cycles of the research process. In an Open Floor class/workshop, the movement cycle helps the “mover and teacher know where they are, and how to use embodied movement to navigate [this space] well (Open Floor International 2017: 28).” It thus functions as a guide that helps highlight where one is situated within a particular process, as well the unique resources, focuses, and qualities that can help one navigate this process place. I similarly use the movement cycle to support the readers and myself to orient the different sections of the research, emphasizing diverse focuses, intentions, and research qualities that are important. The five chapters of the inquiry are hence structured in line with the movement cycle, together unfolding four research parts that together manifest a research whole<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> See also chapter 3.3.1 for a deeper engagement with the movement cycle.

The first chapter, *The Research Design*, corresponds to the beginning process of the movement cycle. It is called *OPEN ATTENTION* and refers to an open and initiatory process where one embraces and attempts to stay receptive towards “all dimensions of our humanness (Open Floor International 2017: 28)” by letting “our attention (...) travel inside and out without direction, allowing ourselves to notice and include anything that’s true in the moment (Open Floor International 2017: 28).” The first chapter of the research is therefore guided by openness. I have, while writing it, attempted to stay open to key foundational questions, including: what is moving with and through me in the here and now? What feels important to notice? What emerges as I tap into a lived field of embodied peaces? Out of this, a first chapter that introduces the research topic(s), its question(s), the narrative methodology that I apply, as well as key research literature emerges. Chapter 1 is with this the longer, in-depth introduction to the larger research design.

The second and third chapter, *Dynamics of a ‘Disembodied’ Self* and *Open Floor*, are inspired from the second process of the movement cycle, which is called *ENTER*. It is a process that describes the endeavor to “deliberately go towards a particular sensation, emotion, thought or image. (...) To focus our attention in a particular direction, to walk through a doorway with curiosity, and willingness to investigate (Open Floor International 2017: 28).” It therefore implies a deeper theoretical engagement with dynamics, theories, authors, and questions that are relevant. Chapter 2, *Dynamics of a ‘Disembodied Self’*, begins from the core question regarding how experiences of ‘disembodiment’ can influence and shape an ‘inner-outer’ fabric of peaces. It thus investigates a so-called Cartesian-inspired ‘mind-body’ split, inquiring into metaphors, qualities, ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating that can unfold from such a ‘disembodied’ engagement with oneself and the world. The aim is to approach a beginning ground of understanding as regards how ‘disembodied’ dynamics can transform through engaging a compassionate and empathic

process of knowing concerning how and why individuals and collectives might engage ‘disembodied’ dynamics this way.

Chapter 3, *Open Floor*, provides a descriptive, critical, and reflective account of Open Floor. It hence explains and reflects upon the Open Floor curriculum, as well as the organizational structure of Open Floor International (the organization behind Open Floor). It further critically engages some of the sociocultural-historical influences that move behind Open Floor. The reason I involve the latter concerns my previous discussion of a decolonial awareness, considering how Open Floor might also, in its current form, be a practice that unfolds relevance especially and/or mainly for so-called ‘Western’ contexts of peaces. By exploring some of the sociocultural-historical influences that move behind, I can begin to ask whether and how Open Floor might also expand its relevance to include different contexts and dynamics than what it currently (mainly) evolves. The main purpose of this third chapter is thus to emerge a foundational ground of explanation, contextualization, and understanding that helps move the discussion into the following and main chapter 4 of the research.

The fourth chapter, which is the main research chapter, is titled *Unfolding Embodied Peaces through Open Floor*. It is guided by a process that in the movement cycle is called *EXPLORE*, which constitutes the major part of the cycle. *EXPLORE* is where “we broaden, deepen, expand and play with what is most compelling (...) (Open Floor International 2017: 28).” In the context of this research, it implies the engagement of seven in-depth, narrative, and qualitative interviews that I have co-conducted with long-term Open Floor practitioners (teachers). These interviews revolve around the Open Floor teachers’ personal experiences of transformations and peaces through practicing Open Floor, unfolding as in-depth and qualitative ways ‘to open windows’ (Josselson 2011: 239) into a multifaceted realm of lived dance and movement experiences. I vitally enquire into these personal experiences together

with my personal reflections as well as with relevant literature, hence manifesting a relational multilogue that helps me co-emerge meaningful answers as regards the research question(s).

As the research approaches the ending of its cycle by dancing into the fifth and last chapter, *A Concluding: Arriving at an Embodied Continuation*, it enters the process that in the movement cycle is called SETTLE. SETTLE is “a form of digestion, integration, and re-organization (Open Floor International 2017: 28).” It is therefore the part of the research where the research topic and I reflect upon our journey together and agree to close our relational engagement for now. The fifth chapter provides in this sense a form of completion, summarizing, and reflecting upon the research findings as well as pointing towards further lines of enquiries. Nonetheless, it is, as mentioned, not a final and complete ending but a simultaneous ending and an opening into something new. Open Floor International puts this wisdom as such: the movement cycle “is our movement meditation spiral, continuous and never-ending (Open Floor International 2017: 28).” For a researcher and her topic(s), the same dance of spiraling and deepening moves will keep manifesting. I am hence certain that even though my research and I will close our current relational engagement, we will continue to encounter each other in new and different forms. With these open-ended words, therefore, I OPEN ATTENON towards the first chapter of the research.

# OPEN ATTENTION

*I breathe*

*inhaling with my feet  
in the dew-covered grass, and  
exhaling with my palms  
facing the sun  
curious, I am  
and  
aching in the questions*

*how do I dance in the dancing?  
how do I become in the becoming?*

*I sink  
into the ground  
exhaling, and  
allowing my spine to surrender*

*to the answers  
that are not yet, and  
the questions  
that pulsate*

*I breathe*



## Chapter 1: The Research Design

This first research chapter is, as mentioned, the larger in-depth discussion of the research design at large. I thus begin by discussing the core research topic(s) before I move to present the main research question and its sub-questions, as well as the narrative methodology that I apply. Finally, I provide a general overview of key research literature.

### 1.1 The Research Topic(s): ('Dis')Embodiment (and Open Floor)

To begin with my main research topic(s), I center my engagement around the core notion of *embodied/embodiment*. I can in this manner formulate how my research carries meaning and is relevant for peace research, as well as how Open Floor emerges as an interesting practice to explore. Moreover, I can explain how I use the word 'disembodied' not to argue an ontological reality of being alive but to describe a possible and in many contexts dominating way of experiencing, understanding, and relating with oneself and the world. Canadian author and embodiment facilitator Philip Shepherd describes in this respect embodiment as "a state in which your entire intelligence is experienced as a coherent unity attuned to the world (Shepherd 2017: 53)." Two core dynamics that inspire my ways of researching embodiment are with this underlined. First, embodiment orient towards *wholeness*. Vitally however, I do not understand this wholeness to emerge as 'a state' but as a dynamic process of ever-changing (dis)equilibriums. Furthermore, embodiment does not always manifest as 'a coherent unity' but unfolds as a *paradoxical* web that includes multifaceted wholeness and contradictory 'parts' - both at the same time. Second, embodiment is *relational*. It thus, as Shepherd expresses, dynamically attunes to and even is and becomes the world. In the following, I discuss these two core dynamics of embodiment. First however, I briefly engage the underlying peace philosophy that I apply, which serves as a basic ground of awareness regarding how and why embodiment is so important to engage when it comes to peaces.

### 1.1.1 The Wholeness-Oriented Focus of Transrational Peace Philosophy

I am as stated guided by, amongst others, a *transrational peace philosophy* in this inquiry (Dietrich 2012, 2013, 2018, Echavarría Alvarez et al. 2018, Koppensteiner 2020, Ditzel Facci 2020, Tjersland and Ditzel Facci 2019). I personally encountered this peace philosophy when I was a master student at the MA Program in Peace Studies at the University of Innsbruck, Austria in 2014-2016, at which point I became inspired by this program's abilities to integrate more-than-only-rational processes into endeavors of peaces. It was for example here that I for the first came across conscious dance and movement, through the 5Rhythms practice<sup>5</sup>, as an embodied peace resource. Nevertheless, even though I was in many ways inspired by much of what I learnt in this program, I simultaneously need to underline how there has also been important points of criticism raised towards this program related to some of its practices and its administration (see Mair 2021ab, Zeit im Bild 2 2021). I have also myself experienced harmful consequences in relation to some of these points. As someone who is by far 'neutral' therefore, but personally affected, I emphasize how even though I (still) find it fruitful to engage diverse aspects of a transrational peace philosophy in this inquiry, I do so with a key awareness regarding how also this philosophy - as with all theories, philosophies, and practices - needs to be continuously (re)evaluated and (re)engaged. With this important caveat, hence, I discuss parts of this philosophy that I still find inspiring related to my research topic(s) within the following paragraphs.

The founding peace scholar behind the transrational approach, Wolfgang Dietrich, has researched how peaces are lived and understood within a variety of cultural and historical contexts (Dietrich 2012, Dietrich et. al 2014). He has furthermore systematized these different peace interpretations into what he names the five peace families, with the transrational peace family being one of these five. Moreover, each peace family highlight important focuses, values, and dynamics that are relevant for peaces. At the same time, the

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<sup>5</sup> See my previous explanation of the 5Rhythms practice in footnote 3.

different peace families are not understood as separate and exclusive categories but as “shades of differences and degrees of affiliations (Echavarría Alvarez et al. in Dietrich et al. 2014: 598).” With it, the dynamic awareness of the *many peaces* (Dietrich and Sützl 2006) arises, (re)engaging peaces as a multifaceted and ever-changing web. The different contexts, relationships, and actors involved are thus highly influential as regards how a certain peace is imagined, experienced, and engaged. Kester et al. argues how it shifts the question “from ‘how can we achieve peace’ to ‘what kind of peace are we seeking to achieve?’ (Kester et al. 2019: 281).” In the context of this research, my short answer would be to help (re)unfold a lived web of peaces that can be authentically felt and continuously co-created within, between, and amongst embodied-relational contact boundaries at work. This makes the (re)engagement of embodied ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating become key.

Dutch psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk (2014) argues how the physical, sensate body is the seat of experience and aliveness. The physical, sensate body helps manifest a basic sense of self, unfolding as the foundational experience for one’s ongoing existence (see also Sheets-Johnstone 1999, Levine 2010, Fogel 2009). van der Kolk works with how trauma moves in the body, arguing how a well-known response to overwhelming experiences is to ‘shut down’ visceral self-connections. This ‘shutting down’ can to a certain degree ‘numb’ one’s terrifying sensations, yet it can also bring about a deadening of one’s “capacity to feel fully alive (van der Kolk 2014: 92)” because how can anyone “make decisions, or put any plan into action, if they [cannot] define what they [want] or, to be more precise, what the sensations in their bodies, the basis of all emotions, [are] trying to tell them (van der Kolk: 92)?” Although I am not working directly with trauma in this research, I see valuable wisdom emerging from understanding how humans can react in such overwhelming situations. If the physical, sensate body is ‘home’ - the seat of experience and aliveness - what happens if this self-connection is restricted or ‘missing’? What changes in one’s capacities to relate with

oneself and the surroundings if one cannot truly sense one's embodied participation in the world? In my understanding, there are deep interconnections happening between the ability to feel home, take care of, and affirmatively relate to one's 'inner' wholeness and the ability to feel home, take care of, and affirmatively relate with the wholeness 'around' - and vice versa.

Within the transrational peace family, a key focus lies in this regard on the wholeness-oriented movement of dynamic equilibriums: *homeostasis* (Dietrich 2012: 210-269, Echavarría Alvarez and Koppensteiner in Echavarría Alvarez et al. 2018.). It implies that one continuously seeks to integrate and differentiate a multiplicity of dynamics and truths, (re)embracing how peaces are a pluriversal (Escobar 2020) and ever-changing web that constantly emerges differently anew depending on how diverse relational conflicts - dynamic imbalances - are (re)engaged and transformed (Koppensteiner 2020, Ditzel Facci 2020, Tjersland and Ditzel Facci 2019). As a transrationally-oriented peace researcher, therefore, I am concerned with navigating the manifold balances and imbalances that arise, engaging a systemic understanding (Satir et al. 1991, Bateson 2000, Dietrich 2014) to holistically look for transformative potentials in relation to one or more elements within a system, whose potentialities for transformation can then move to influence the larger system through their interconnectedness with the other elements as well as the system as a whole. Said differently, transformation can, and does, emerge equally from 'within' and 'without'. Furthermore, it does not only emerge through so-called 'mental' and rational processes but evolves through multifaceted processes of embodied wholeness. It hence puts the question of where and how an embodied-relational change can most fruitfully be initiated as a core and essence of what transrational peace research is about (see also Lederach 2005, 2014, Lederach and Lederach 2010, Schirch and Camp 2004, Martínez Guzmán 2005, Curle quoted in Woodhouse and Lederach 2016). My core focus on embodied peaces in this research is a result of such a

transrational awareness, finding that the ‘disembodied’ onto-epistemological heritage that I explore tend to move behind many current imbalances that arise both ‘within’ and ‘without’.

### 1.1.2 The Paradoxical Process of Embodied Wholeness

Moving with this to deeper explore the core notion of embodied/embodiment itself, I highlight how Shepherd describes embodiment as a wholeness-oriented move:

embodiment isn’t about quieting the thoughts in the head and noticing the sensations of the body from there - it’s about bringing the abstract intelligence of the head into relationship with the body’s intelligence. Wholeness is never either/or - it’s both/and. (...) In that state [of wholeness] any distinction between ‘mind’ and ‘the body’s energy’ becomes meaningless (Shepherd 2017: 52-53).

Shepherd attempts with this to shift a deeply ingrained and often (un)consciously lived ‘disembodied’ understanding regarding how humans consist of so-called separated and distinct ‘parts’. He hence refuses to place a ‘locus of control’ in ‘the head alone’ but allows full embodied agency to move through a dynamic process of wholeness. It becomes in this manner an endeavor of living that includes *both* dynamics of ‘mind’ *and* the so-much-more that embodied life includes, expanding into multiple both-and’s rather than a separating either-or. Nonetheless, I argue how this lived endeavor of wholeness can at times also involve to ‘quiet the thoughts in the head and noticing the sensations of the body’ (although not *from* the head alone) as well as to ‘meaningfully talk about distinctions between the mind and the body’s energies.’ What do I mean by these seemingly wholeness-contradictory words? I underline in this respect how I, as mentioned, consider embodiment to manifest as a *paradoxical* process. I therefore find it necessary to relate with, engage, and speak about embodiment *both* in terms of an undivided whole *and* in terms of unique dynamics and ‘parts’. This is because embodied life constantly unfolds through such a paradoxical both-and dance. ‘Body’ and ‘mind’ are thus qualitatively different yet integrated processes of the whole *and* the whole undivided. To help explain what I mean, I engage US American

professor of international peacebuilding John Paul Lederach' (2005) attitude of *paradoxical curiosity* as well as the paradoxical wisdom inherent in the Taoist symbol *yin-yang*.

Lederach argues how paradoxical curiosity is a key attitude to tap into within peace and conflict contexts. It can help unfold capacities to be present with and engage the many ambiguities, discomforts, and uncertainties that arise, inviting an ability to dare the both-ands. Paradoxical curiosity can in this sense help one embrace how dualistic categories are real, created, necessary, and experienced (without allowing them to become the only truth) *and* look for in-between spaces where larger dynamics of wholeness can unfold (Lederach 2005: 36-37). It can hence help one unfold a similar pluriversal awareness as previously highlighted related to Escobar, approaching the world as a “web formed of interwoven lines and threads, always in motion (Escobar 2020: 26).” It can thus invite a possibility to engage a multitude of relations and spaces of truth *while also* looking for ways that these spaces and relations co-interact. It is a way to approach realities

with an abiding respect for complexity, a refusal to fall prey to the pressures of forced dualistic categories of truth, and an inquisitiveness about what may hold together seemingly contradictory (...) energies in a greater whole. This is not primarily a thrust toward finding the common ground based on a narrowly shared denominator. Paradoxical curiosity seeks something beyond what is visible, something that hold apparently contradictory and even violently opposed (...) energies together (Lederach 2005: 36).

As a researcher, Open Floor teacher, and human being, I am profoundly inspired by this attitude of paradoxical curiosity that Lederach describes. I have time after time discovered how the most meaningful answers arise from such risky endeavors of letting paradoxes speak. Furthermore, I realize how embodied peaces are constantly lived in this both-and way. The word ‘paradox’ refers to “a situation or a statement that seems impossible or is difficult to understand because it contains two opposite facts or characteristics (Cambridge Dictionary 2020a).” With an attitude of paradoxical curiosity, however, these ‘impossible’ and ‘ungraspable’ dynamics do not become reasons to avoid a topic or question

but emerge as significant indications that in these very spaces lie some deep truths about being alive. I am in this respect furthermore inspired by another tradition that has taken this paradoxical wisdom seriously and fueled it into the lived realm of embodied existence. It is Taoism, which through its symbol of *yin-yang* paints a meaningful picture of how the paradoxes of life can be affirmatively lived, guiding an understanding for how dynamics such as ‘body’ and ‘mind’ can be engaged as *both* complementary dualities *and* as a whole.

The *yin-yang* symbol is not an exclusively Taoist symbol and originates in traditions that precede Taoist philosophies (Cooper 2010: 19). It has however come to inhabit a central space in Taoism, representing the core principle of “dualism in the manifest world (Cooper 2010: 19).” It thus symbolizes the two seeming opposite yet interrelated forces of life, which continuously co-interact in a reciprocal and ever-transforming relationship. *Yin* is the passive and receptive principle; *yang* is the active and creative one (Cooper 1981: 14). Cooper furthermore argues how the tensions and opposites inherent in this *yin-yang* dynamic exist out of ‘necessity’ (Cooper 2010: 20). It is therefore their dynamic and ongoing interplay that give rise to the realm of relationship and “for anything to be able to be conceived in the manifest world there must be a relationship (Cooper 2010: 19).” It is in other words through the relational and ever-changing dance of *yin-yang* that continuous creation and transformation of the phenomenal world, and with this embodied experience, arise (Cooper 2010: 19). Without the creative duality of *yin-yang*, embodied life would not be.

At the same time, *yin-yang* is also *Tao*. *Tao* is the underlying First and undivided principle of Taoism, being “inexpressible in words, being no-thing-ness, yet the potential of all things (...) the non-existent containing the potential of existence (Cooper 2010: 8).” It is in other words an indefinable and primordial Oneness that always *is* and that therefore moves beyond definitions, words, and intellect. *Yin-yang*, hence, is a paradox. It is not only dualities but also non-dual; it is not only two but also the same. It is expressed in the symbol itself

through how both *yin* and *yang* contain the seed of their opposites (Cooper 2010: 19). The black dot in the white and the white dot in the black symbolize how the one is also the other and how the two cannot exist without them both.<sup>6</sup>

Conflict and cooperation go with this hand in hand in Taoism (Chuang 2002). All qualities and processes of the manifest world are opposing *and* the same, harmonious *and* conflicting, unified *and* divided, complementary *and* exclusive (Cooper 2010, 1981). From a Taoist perspective, peaces and conflicts, ‘body’ and ‘mind’, ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ go hand in hand. They are simultaneously different, yet in relation, *and* the same. This makes *yin-yang* neither a neglection of the whole nor a denial of differences but involves interrelated and ‘opposite’ dualities - *yin-yang* - and non-duality - *Tao* - at the same time, in the same space, and on equal terms. It furthermore embraces paradoxes not as a web to be ‘resolved’ but as a process that to be continuously and creatively engaged. For a so-called ‘Cartesian mind’ that by default attempts to organize the world into controllable categories, this Taoist understanding can be a difficult perspective to embrace.

One of the most challenging processes that I face as an Open Floor teacher and researcher is in this respect how I, at the one hand, understand and experience embodied life as undivided wholeness. I thus agree with the previous quote from Shepherd regarding how “any distinction between ‘mind’ and the ‘body’s energies’ is meaningless (Shepherd 2017: 53).” At the other hand, I continuously engage distinctions and ‘parts’ as equally necessary and real. For example, to meaningfully relate with wholeness, I need to single out differences. To teach, write about, and live the ‘meaninglessness of mind-body distinctions’, I rely upon a capacity to differentiate their uniqueness. Without this capacity, I become lost in a wordless realm of undivided Oneness that can never be adequately expressed only felt and pointed towards through language that honors the limits of language itself. This is the

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<sup>6</sup> It is outside of the scope of this research to engage a throughout discussion of Taoism and the many intricacies involved *Tao* and other Taoist notions. I therefore concentrate on the *yin-yang* symbol, discussing how this symbol inspires my understanding of embodiment.



paradox I face. ‘Mind’ and ‘body’ are the same, yet they are also different. It is therefore vital to keep engaging these many complementary and conflicting truths that I encounter, constantly endeavoring the imperfect process of expressing embodied peaces through words that can never reach the full depths of what embodied peaces are. On the felt level of experience, I *know* how life is non-differentiable. As a dancer and mover, I do *not* experience myself and the world through distinct qualities but unfold through the undivided wholeness of the movement that *is*. Nonetheless, I also know how I can - voluntarily or involuntarily - make the move to step out of this wholeness-experience and focus upon unique qualities and ‘parts’. Both possibilities are vital, both possibilities are real. They furthermore both guide me as a researcher, as an Open Floor teacher, and through my practice as a dancer and mover. In this inquiry therefore, I discuss mind-body interconnections *and* I honor their undivided wholeness. I focus on unique qualities and ‘parts’ *and* I drop into the realm of undistinguishable Oneness. I use words like ‘body’ and ‘mind’ *and* I touch the living, breathing existence that lingers beyond words altogether.

Independent scholar, philosopher and previous dancer Maxine Sheets-Johnstone proposes in this regard to not use the word ‘embodiment’ at all but rather engage the term ‘animate form’. She contends how “the term [embodiment] is little more than a lexical band-aid covering a three-hundred year old Western wound (Sheets-Johnstone 1999: 310-311).” Indeed, in its original meaning, the word ‘embodiment’ can invite a juxtaposition between ‘body’ and ‘mind’. Etymologically speaking, ‘embody’ means ‘in body’ (Simpson and Weiner 1989: 165), historically associating with a separated ‘soul’/‘mind’<sup>7</sup> that ‘inhabits’ - is *in* - a physical body (Smith 2017). Furthermore, the word(s) embodied/embodiment are, as British-based educational scholars Jennifer Leigh and Nicole Brown put it, “contentious words that are understood and used in different ways (Leigh and Brown 2021: 7, based on

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<sup>7</sup> Descartes uses the terms ‘soul’ and ‘mind’ rather interchangeably. See chapter 2.2.

Sheets-Johnstone 2015).” Nevertheless, I emphasize how it might be precisely because this multifaceted word interrelates with a, as Sheets-Johnstone puts it, ‘three-hundred year old Western wound’ that it becomes fruitful to engage it. ‘Embodiment/embodied’ is after all used by Open Floor International (2017, 2018) as well as by important literature in the field (see Ellingson 2017, Fogel 2009, Lakoff and Johnson 1999, Shepherd 2017). It is in this sense a word that contain a multitude of tensions, moving betwixt and between historical associations and new embodied possibilities. In this context, I am curious to involve how the multifaceted dimensions and in-between spaces that this word create can help shape, transform, resist, and unfold both me and others. In my understanding, these creative tensions need not be avoided but can be tapped and engaged into throughout the research process.

Another way that the paradoxical process of embodied wholeness can be approached is therefore through the notions of *embodied* and *conceptual self-awareness*. These terms are put forth by US professor of psychology and bodywork practitioner Alan Fogel and refer to two qualitatively different modes of experiencing/understanding that humans are capable of. *Embodied self-awareness* orients towards wholeness and is an immediate felt sense of the here and now that manifests “without the mediating influence of judgmental thoughts (Fogel 2009: 1).” *Conceptual self-awareness* orients towards distinct qualities, categories, and ‘parts and involves an ability to define, think about, and categorize. This latter process hence flourishes in the realm of language and invites an ability to also abstract (Fogel 2009: 29-31). Vitality, both these processes are crucial. A conceptual mode of awareness helps one make sense of and orient the ongoing flow of experience; an embodied mode helps one unfold integration and invites capacities to ‘simply be with’ the dynamic dance of life (Fogel 2009: 29-31). Both processes furthermore intertwine and are thus not separated but co-unfolding. Parallels can in this manner be drawn to the integrated top-down and bottom-up flow of information previously discussed in relation to Siegel (2011) and Lakoff and Johnson (1980,

1999, Johnson 2007). With it, the juxtaposition between ‘disembodied’ and ‘embodied’ so often (un)consciously applied to thinking and language can be better understood. Embodiment includes a leaning towards and focus upon embodied self-awareness yet does not exclude the equally important process of conceptual self-awareness. ‘Disembodiment’ emerges on the other hand as a dominance of mainly/only conceptual self-awareness that is largely disconnected from embodied self-awareness. In this manner, the relationships between multiple expressions as well as the experiences of the whole become absent. This makes it possible, at least in one’s experience of it, to ‘think oneself apart’.

In the Open Floor curriculum, embodiment is understood in a similar both-and manner. The curriculum focuses upon four unique *dimensions of embodiment*, which together describe “what it means to wholly inhabit our entire selves (Open Floor International 2017: 14).” These four embodied dimensions are however not understood as separated entities, but as integrated processes that together “comprise an inseparable weave of our humanness (Open Floor International 2017: 14).” The 1) *physical body*, 2) *emotional body*, 3) *embodied mind*, and 4) *embodied soul*, which are the four embodied dimensions that Open Floor engages<sup>8</sup>, are thus approached through an attitude of paradoxical awareness. It implies that embodied engagement involves the human dance *both* as a whole *and* as unique dynamics and ‘parts’. According to Open Floor International: “it’s our goal and privilege as teachers to guide and inspire people to move and include whatever shows up in any given moment (Open Floor International 2017: 7).” Simultaneously, “there is no real separation between these aspects of ourselves, and our job and privilege (...) is to serve the whole human being in all their strength and vulnerability (Open Floor International 2017: 7).” Crucially therefore, my focus on embodiment as an Open Floor teacher does *not* mean to deny or devalue processes of ‘mind’ but to bring abstract ‘mental’ intelligence and holistic here and now embodied

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<sup>8</sup> See also my deeper engagement with the different parts of the Open Floor curriculum throughout chapter 3.

intelligence into a dynamic and paradoxical relationship. This dynamic is furthermore an essential aspect involved in how I, as a peace researcher, understand and relate with Open Floor as an embodied peace resource within this research inquiry.

### **1.1.3 Embodiment as Relational**

When it comes to the second dynamic involved in embodiment, relationality, Shepherd affirms how embodiment is not only a wholeness-oriented endeavor but always also a relational one. He hence contends how the embodied whole knows “*it belongs to the world, expresses the world, is held by the world and shares in all that happens in the world*” (Shepherd 2017: 26. Emphasis in original). In this manner, he views the physical body not as an ‘impenetrable boundary’ that separates the individual from the surrounding but through the metaphor of a resonator (Shepherd 2017: 56), (re)engaging embodied existence as a process that dynamically attunes - resonates - *with* and *as* the world. It is thus, in a paradoxical sense, a unique part of the world and the world itself. I emphasize in this regard how I understand embodied living to unfold as such an ongoing process of relational being and becoming. I therefore find it key to acknowledge interconnectedness with both human and more-than-human surroundings. In another text (Tjersland 2019), I have underlined how embodied relationality is not only about intersubjective relations with other humans but evolve through interpenetrating relationships with oneself, others, communities, collectives, more-than-human life, the world, the universe, and more. For example, Johnson (2007: 276-277) and Ellingson (2009) discuss cultural dynamics as well as relations with the natural world. In this sense, Open Floor works, briefly summed up, with four *relational hungers*. They are: 1) relations with oneself, 2) relations with close others, 3) relations with a group/community/society, and 4) relations with a larger whole/spirit (Open Floor International 2017, 2018). Embodied relationality is therefore not an *either* inside *or* outside, *either* individual *or* collective, but a dynamic web that unfolds through multiple and

interconnected processes. It thus emerges in line with the previously discussed notion ‘contact boundary at work’ (Perls 1973), (re)emerging embodied existence as an endeavor of continuous and ever-unfolding encounter.

Lederach and Lederach underline, particularly related to contexts of protracted violence<sup>9</sup>, how social healing is “an intermediary phenomenon located between micro-individual healing and wider collective reconciliation (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 6).” They hence emphasize healing as a both ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ endeavor, unfolding through ‘spacemoments of resonance’. These are embodied-relational spacemoments in which people feel close enough and in relation enough to see and be seen, hear and be heard, touch and be touched (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 110). ‘Spacemoments of resonance’, therefore, help individuals and collectives attune themselves to each other, (re)emerging potentials for transformation through facilitating a dynamic resonance space (see also Badenoch 2017, Siegel 2011, Brown 2012, Kaur 2022). In this manner, they help underscore the vitality of relationships and accentuate the importance of encounter in contexts of peaces and conflicts.

What the relational nature of embodied living amongst others helps underline concerns how embodied beings are, throughout their lives, in a perpetual process of transformation (Koppensteiner 2009). It is a fundamental understanding of movement and change that is mirrored in one of the core dynamics of Open Floor. As a dance and movement practice, Open Floor works with embodied wholes *as they move* (Tjersland 2019). It therefore includes to involve what shows up in the here and now *and* continuously move this here and now into new and further possibilities. This two-fold dynamic is amongst others expressed in one of the core values of Open Floor International, *move & include* (Open Floor International 2017), which underlines how dancing and moving is an engagement of “dynamics present *and* potentials for further transformations (Tjersland 2019: 302. Emphasis added).” Through

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<sup>9</sup> They discuss for example Colombia and the healing and reconciliation that is needed after years of protracted violence, internal displacement, insecurity, and more.

dancing and moving, one can “cultivate a sensory awareness of how the ever-unfolding flow of one’s ongoing transformations is happening and creatively participate in these transformations as they unfold (Tjersland 2019: 302).” LaMothe (2015) calls it to actively participate in the ‘rhythms of bodily becoming’. It is thus through an ongoing engagement of this ‘inner-outer’ movement that individuals and collectives can manifest, create, transform, and unfold anew because, as Sheets-Johnstone puts it, “we make sense of the world - we make it intelligible in and through movement (...) and we make sense of ourselves - we make ourselves intelligible in and through movement (Sheets-Johnstone 2010: 11).” In neuroscience, it is similarly acknowledged how humans are deeply relational and dynamic. They therefore *need* other humans, as well as relations with more-than-human surroundings, to continuously flourish, grow, thrive, and survive (Damasio 1994, Johnson 2007, Fogel 2009, Lewis et al. 2000). Relationality, hence, is not an add-on to the human dance but part and parcel of its embodied core.

What, in this regard, happens to peaces when this fundamental need and capacity for relationship is devalued, not taken seriously, and/or suppressed due to a dominance of ‘disembodied’ frames that ‘hide’ embodied ways? How difficult and/or easy is to cultivate relational capacities in such spaces and contexts? I argue in this respect how it is necessary to inquire *both* into how embodied peaces can be blocked in this manner *and* into how they can be (re)unfolded. Spanish peace researcher Vicent Martínez Guzmán’s (2005) emphasize how ‘yes, we humans can and know how to make peaces’ (Spanish: *podemos hacer las paces*). For these ‘peacemaking skills’ to unfold, however, we need to cultivate spaces where these capacities can flourish. This in difference from creating spaces where these capacities are suppressed, devalued, and/or dismissed. In a comparable vein, British peace researcher Adam Curle engages the difference between creating peaceful and unpeaceful relationships. He argues how unpeaceful relationships “do [physical, economic, social, and/or psychological]

damage to one or more of the parties involved (Curle quoted in Woodhouse and Lederach 2016: 42),” whereas peaceful relationships help individuals and collectives affirm and unfold their ongoing potentials for wholeness (Curle quoted in Woodhouse and Lederach 2016: 54-57). Through this research focused on Open Floor and embodied peaces, I hope to encounter at least some meaningful pointers towards how this more life-affirming realm of relationality can be (re)cultivated and (re)unfolded.

## 1.2 The Research Question(s)

I share at this point my main research question as well as the three families of sub questions that it involves. After this, I move to engage the narrative research methodology that I apply, My research question(s) reads:

### **In which ways can Open Floor help unfold embodied peaces?**

- 1) Which dynamics do embodied peaces include? How are these dynamics embedded in Open Floor?
- 2) How does a Cartesian-inspired splitting between ‘body’ and ‘mind’ influence and restrict embodied ‘inner-outer’ peace possibilities? How can these dynamics transform?
- 3) In which ways have practicing Open Floor unfolded embodied peace potentials in the lives of longer-term Open Floor practitioners (teachers)? Are there also limitations and/or further possibilities to Open Floor in this regard?

## 1.3 Narrative Inquiry

To explore some meaningful answers to the above written research question(s), I lean, as mentioned, upon a narrative research methodology. ‘Narrative and story’<sup>10</sup> are in this sense the basic lens for *understanding*, *interpreting*, as well as *gathering information* as regards the research question(s). A main motivation behind this methodological choice concerns how I

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<sup>10</sup> I understand the terms ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ rather interchangeably in this research. I nonetheless acknowledge how there are fluid differences between how various authors define and interpret the two notions, amongst others related to the degree of partiality and completeness that they involve (Kim 2016: 9). Simultaneously, there is no consistent and unified understanding in the field, which Rooney et al. point out when they state: “confusion about what is a ‘narrative’ and a ‘story’ is inevitable as both are essentially one in the same (Rooney et al. 2016: 148).” I work in this context with ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ as fluidly overlapping and dynamically interconnected terms. The small and potential differences that they arise are of little to no importance practically as well as theoretically. I therefore integrate the two into a dynamic understanding, co-unfolding them as a meaningful “framework through which [I, the researcher] can explore and investigate the ways individuals experience the world around them [as well as, I add, themselves] (Rooney et al. 2016: 148).”

understand narratives and stories to be deeply ingrained within the process of being human, especially as regards *embodied-relational* meaning-making processes.

Canadian professors of educational studies D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly argue in this respect how narrative inquiry is a (holistic) “way of understanding experience (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 20).” Hence, “if we understand the world narratively (...) it makes sense to study the world narratively (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 17).” I correspondingly work with stories and narratives in this research because I see them as key within a human dance, manifesting human experience as a deeply storied and narrative endeavor (see also Connelly 2006, Josselson 2004, 2011, Kim 2016, Rooney et al. 2016, Mehl-Madrona 2005, Oelrich 2014, Atkinson 2012). Importantly however, I do not, as touched upon, understand this storied and narrative endeavor to emerge as a ‘disembodied’ process but as a multifaceted journey that includes sensate, emotional, and mental dynamics, as well as, I add, ongoing relational engagements. Stories and narratives therefore emphasize a fundamentally *embodied-relational* reality, emerging as ways that contact boundaries at work are and can become highlighted and expressed, engaged and understood, unfolded and transformed. US American psychiatrist, professor of clinical psychology, and storyteller with lineage from Anglo-European and Native American traditions, Lewis Mehl-Madrona states it rather bluntly: “we are our stories. We live them as they live us (Mehl-Madrona 2005: 9).”

I conduct because of this a research that emphasizes, explores, and listens to the many narrative forms that I encounter. I consider it a key epistemological choice, referring amongst others back to the quote previously highlighted related to Johnson regarding how “reclaiming the felt experience of [our bodies] is [also] a political act (...) (Johnson, R 2018: 131).” If stories and narratives are profoundly embodied, they can help (re)unfold wholeness-oriented ways of knowing that can potentially resist, make visible, question, and transform so-called ‘disembodied’ ways. Clandinin and Connelly (2000: 49) underline in this respect how one of



the most important aspects that I, as a narrative inquirer, can explore is to understand what I, as a narrative inquirer, actually *do*. The word ‘narrative’ carries in this sense a twofold connotation that helps underline how narratives and stories constitute processes both of *telling* and of *knowing* (Kim 2016: 6). A narrative inquiry therefore centers around stories and narratives not only as the phenomena under study but also as the method of study - the way of knowing - itself (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 4). It implies that an awareness of and engagement with stories and narratives is included and taken seriously throughout the research process rather than through singular and selected parts. It becomes with this key to apply ‘narrative thinking’ (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, Kim 2016) throughout the research journey, continuously asking questions such as: how do individuals and collectives experience, understand, and relate amidst the ‘inner-outer’ and top-down/bottom-up dynamics of their lives? What can these multifaceted meaning-making processes tell about embodied peaces in connection to Open Floor? To lay a foundation for answering these questions, I discuss in the following two core dynamics related to how stories and narratives emerge. They are: 1) *narratives and stories as dynamic and holistic meaning-making processes* and 2) *narratives and stories as intimate, relational encounters*.

### **1.3.1 Narratives and Stories as Dynamic and Holistic Meaning-Making Processes**

Mehl-Madrona describes stories as “a unit of meaning that provides a frame for interpreting experience (Mehl-Madrona 2005: 152).” He argues with this how humans through *what* and *how* they tell about their experiences - how they narrate themselves and their surroundings - co-unfold meanings and interpretations in relation to these experiences that they live. This, in turn, influences how individuals and collectives understand and experience themselves and their surroundings anew. Importantly therefore, humans carry a potential to always tell their stories differently within each new context and setting (Mehl-Madrona 2005). An experience and the ways that it is being told are with this never set in stone but dynamic reflections of

the meaning-making that occurs within each here and now. It does not mean that humans purposefully ‘manipulate’ their stories, but that the telling of a story emerges within a certain timespace that involves specific meaning-making frames.

US American professor of psychology and psychotherapist Ruthellen Josselson contends in a similar vein how it is impossible to “claim any finality to what a story means, since any story has potential for revision in future stories (Josselson 2011: 227, based amongst others on Bakhtin 1981, 1986).” It implies that even though the historical content of a story and narrative might not change, the *relationships* to the content that it is being expressed and made sense of in the here and now are constantly re-unfolded by tellers and listeners alike. Stories and narratives therefore transform and arise through each new telling and living, each new re-telling and re-living (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 71-79). According to Mehl-Madrona, this dynamic can help manifest powerful potentials for healing and transformation, as individuals and collectives can find ways to (re)tell their stories in manners that heal and transform rather than cause/uphold suffering and pain. Importantly however, this narrative ‘(re)negotiation’ (Mehl-Madrona 2005: 3) does not mean to bypass potential pain, trauma, hurt, and more but to continuously (re)emerge life-affirming ways. Dietrich argues: “the central question for transrational peace research (...): how can destructive, violent narratives be retold in a new manner so that the relations, places in the world, and their own history heal? (Dietrich 2012: 264).” Applying this to my research: which stories do I and others tell about ourselves and the world? Do they help us unfold peaces or do they keep us stuck in ‘disembodied’ ways? How can we tell our stories differently?

To begin encountering some meaningful answers to these questions, I highlight how narratives and stories deeply interconnect with the top-down/bottom-up interplay between thinking and experience previously discussed in relation to Siegel (2011) and Lakoff and

Johnson (1980, 1999, Johnson 2007). Narratives and stories create out of bottom-up experience - lived experience from the past and in the here and now - *and* out of top-down structuring - (un)conscious metaphorical frames through which the experience is and has been interpreted, understood, and told. In relation to the latter, a telling of a story 'hide' and 'highlight' (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 10-13) diverse dynamics, understandings, and experiences, which makes the process of story greatly depend upon the telling itself as well as upon the diverse meaning-making processes that this telling includes. It makes with this candidly visible how 'mind' and 'body', thinking and experiencing, unceasingly co-interact.

At the same time, stories and narratives touch a deeper space where dynamics such as 'mind' and 'body' fade to make room for a larger, indefinite unfolding of wholeness. American professor of human development Robert Atkinson states: "story is a tool for making us whole; stories gather up the parts of us and put them together in a way that gives our lives greater meaning (...) (Atkinson 1995: 3)." "Our stories illustrate our inherent connectedness (...) (Atkinson 1995: 4)." Stories and narratives therefore carry a paradoxical power to 'untangle and grasp' the co-unfolding dynamics between thinking and experiencing *and* lean into a wider space where wholeness simply *is*. To help explain I discuss the intricate relationship between bodily experience and language as put forth by US American philosopher and psychologist Eugene T. Gendlin. His philosophies help me reflect upon how narratives and stories include both words and the felt sense, as well as how this embodied-linguistic interplay carries vital potentials to engage the intertwined dynamics of wholeness.

Gendlin uses the term 'felt sense' to describe a holistic here and now experience. It is a sensation of meaning that emerges from embodied presence, which a person first feels as a physical sensation yet that is wider and more than a physical sensation alone (Gendlin 2007: 37-38). The felt sense "is something you do not at first recognize - it is vague and murky. It feels meaningful, but not known. It is a body-sense of meaning (Gendlin 2007:

11).” The felt sense can in this manner never be fully communicated through words yet it can be ‘carried forward’ through ‘words that make sense’ (Gendlin 1997: 12-18). ‘Carry forward’ is also an expression used by Gendlin. It describes how words can help expand the meanings of the felt sense by offering themselves to lived experience. Words can with this support the meaning-making of what is being lived through by speaking from and as the whole (Gendlin 1997). It does not mean that words can ‘pin down’ an experience but that they can ‘try their way’ towards words that might suit (Gendlin 1997, 2004). Expanded meanings can in this manner unfold because words help embodied experience dance into further meaning-making realms. Words, hence, become embodied participants within holistic meaning-making processes. There are of course examples where words are spoken and written in ways that attempt to deny this fundamental interconnectedness, yet, if one embraces words as embodied participants, they are and can become creative (re)sources of wholeness. British clinical psychologist and professor of qualitative research Les Todres writes (in relation to Gendlin’s philosophy of language):

language and bodily experience cannot simply be reduced to one another - both require one another as partners in a conversation, and both phases (embodying and languaging) constitute both limits and freedoms in this conversation - hopefully, a productive tension. Sometimes, the bodily depth of what one has lived through is ‘more than words can say’. Yet such experience ‘looks for’ words. Sometimes, the language of what things mean changes bodily experience, and the words disappear; in and out of language. Embodying language; languaging the body: each has its day in an ongoing process (Todres 2007: 33-34)

I emphasize in this respect how I in this research tap into narratives and stories through such a wholeness-oriented lens. I therefore, as engaged, see them as paradoxical endeavors that touch differentiated dynamics of sensing, feeling, and thinking *as well as* a larger space of wholeness. Stories and narratives thus support incomplete articulations of wholeness *and* tap into how this wholeness keeps transforming anew. ‘Inner’ and ‘outer’, ‘mind’ and ‘body’, individual and collective, can in this manner be co-engaged while *also* touching a deeper space that arises through, between, and beyond these ‘polarities’.

### 1.3.2 Narratives and Stories as Intimate, Relational Encounters

Another vital aspect involved stories and narratives concerns how they are relational processes. It is true both as regards the relational context of the historical event(s) that the story and narrative express - the 'told' - and the relational context in which the story and narrative are now being told - the 'telling' (Josselson 2011: 227). Swedish theatre director, storyteller, and educator Inger Lise Oelrich underlines in this regard how "you can't tell a story to a wall. There has to be at least one listener and one speaker (Oelrich 2014: 33)." She highlights with this how it is neither through the telling nor the listening alone that a narrative and story turns meaningful and alive, but through the relational space that it creates in-between. "That is the smallest possible storytelling situation: two people and a third space between them where the story moves in imagination (Oelrich 2014: 33)."

The telling and witnessing of stories can in this manner take a variety of shapes - speaking and listening, expressing non-verbally and watching, writing and reading. Yet, they always involve a dynamic of both giving and receiving. They thus emerge as relational endeavors that carry potentials to manifest the before discussed 'spacemoments of resonance', which, as engaged, are spacemoments where people feel that they see and are seen, hear and are heard, touch and are touched (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 210). Spacemoments of resonance are in other words essential for peaces, considering how ongoing transformation rely upon such relational capacities to be *moved* by the interconnected flow of one's 'inner-outer' existences (Satir et al. 1991, Lederach 2005, Brantmeier and McKenna 2020, Koppensteiner 2020, Badenoch 2017). US American vulnerability researcher Brené Brown underlines: "connection is why we're [humans] here. We are hardwired to connect with others, it's what gives purpose and meaning to our lives (...) (Brown 2012: 8)."

I want in this respect to bring attention to another relational notion of peaces that is put forth by Spanish peace researcher Francisco A. Muñoz (2006). It is the notion 'imperfect

peace’, which represents a key epistemological twist in peace research. Muñoz proposes to, instead of (always) commencing from violence and war and from there (hopefully) move towards an idea of peace, start from the realities and contexts of peaces themselves. He thus acknowledges how peaces are an integrated part of the everyday ‘unfinished and procedural’ (Muñoz 2006: 241) fabric of life, recognizing how peaces and conflicts are not incompatible opposites but dynamic partners in an integrated flow. As a peace worker, therefore, one can engage an embodied capacity to be simultaneously conflictive and peaceful, rooting peaces and conflicts alike into the ever transforming and relational experience of complexity, multiplicity, and paradox. Koppensteiner writes:

Muñoz argues that a discipline calling itself peace research cannot be satisfied by researching violence and war alone. It must also engage with the small, unfinished, vernacular and everyday peace processes that constitute the major part of human existence. What emerges out of this is the image of an *imperfect peace*. It speaks in a positive sense about the imperfectness of human nature and human relationship as they permanently oscillate between cooperation and conflict (Koppensteiner 2018: 25. Emphasis in original. Translated from German by author).<sup>11</sup>

I affirm in this sense how narratives and stories are a powerful way to tap into such an imperfect peace fabric. Stories and narratives engage a similar ‘unfinished and procedural’ web that emphasizes embodied experiences and their multiple tellings and re-tellings within a relational world. I am in this respect astonished to observe how it within peace academia often seems to be so much easier to look for and engage peaces (and conflicts) ‘out there’ instead of daring to explore our own imperfect livings of them. I wonder: what happens if we bring peace home? In my understanding, this question can help (re)highlight a vital ‘inner-outer’ movement that can help (re)unfold an authentically lived process of transformation rather than an abstract and, I add, often ‘Western’-centric idea about what ‘ought’ or ‘ought

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<sup>11</sup> *Eine Disziplin, meint Muñoz, die sich Friedensforschung nennt, kann sich nicht mit der Erforschung von Gewalt und Krieg zufriedengeben, sondern muss sich auch mit den kleinen, un abgeschlossenen, vernakulären und alltäglichen Prozessen des Friedens beschäftigen, welche die überwiegende Mehrheit des menschlichen Daseins ausmachen. Was so entsteht, ist das Bild eines unvollkommenen Friedens, welcher der im positive Sinne unvollkommenen menschlichen Natur und den menschlichen Beziehungen entspricht, die permanent zwischen Konflikt und Kooperation oszillieren.*

not' to be. It thus mirrors my previous arguments related to Azarmandi (2018) regarding how a key decolonial movement is to dare (re)engage our own imperfect livings of peaces (and conflicts) rather than always looking for the peaces (and conflicts) of so-called 'others'. My exploration of an embodied and relational process of narrative knowing is in this sense one small way to dare (re)embody such an imperfect peace web.

### **1.3.3 Relationally Interviewing Open Floor Teachers**

As regards the main methodological choice for *doing* this narrative inquiry, I include the narrative sharing of experience from seven long term Open Floor practitioners (teachers) who I have encountered through in-depth, qualitative, and narrative interviews conducted via the online communication tool Zoom (Zoom Video Communications 2020). I ask in this context the teachers about their personal experiences of having changed and transformed through practicing Open Floor, focusing upon their lived dance and movement engagements rather than primarily their expert perspectives as teachers. As a narrative researcher, I am particularly interested to explore how these teachers make their experiences *meaningful* through what and how they share. In the following, I highlight key ethical and epistemological considerations that lie behind the interview approach.

The interviews that I conduct are intended to encounter qualitative research data. I therefore seek to explore multifaceted life experiences and embodied meaning-making processes rather than quantifiable answers and statistical tendencies (Mack et al. 2005). The purpose of the interviews becomes in this manner to “illuminate human experience in order to reveal layered meanings (Josselson 2011: 240)” in the hope that it “will bring forth some new understanding that will benefit our wider scholarly field (Josselson 2011: 240).” I hence engage a research that has “understanding and transformation at its heart (Koppensteiner 2020: 76, see also Anderson and Braud 2011: 296),” hoping that the personal sharing of experience that the Open Floor teachers bring can help inspire, unfold, and ignite embodied

peace possibilities - for the research participants and myself, for peace researchers and peace practitioners, for Open Floor teachers and other facilitators, for dancers and movers, for other contact boundaries at work who come into contact with this personal sharing of experience in one way or another.

I approach in this sense the interviews from a deeply relational perspective. It is an epistemological and ethical approach that spring from the basic ontological assumption regarding how the research participants and I are - 'even' within the interview situation - embodied contact boundaries at work. It thus entails that the relational dynamics and the encounters that take place stand in the center of the 'what', 'hows', and 'whys' that I engage during the interview process and in the proceeding engagement with the interview material. It is amongst others inspired from what Koppensteiner (2020) and Josselson (2013) contend related to relational potentials embedded within qualitative research, tapping into how the research participants and I are co-unfolding within a relational space that manifests certain topics and stories more than others out of our individual and shared focuses and experiences. I do however *not* consider this relational co-influence to be primarily a 'bias', but a resource that I can tap into to emerge an inquiry that is *meaningful* in relation to the research topic(s).

I underline in this regard how I am, as a peace researcher, enquiring into some of the most intimate and meaningful dynamics of embodied existence. I am moving within the field of relations, exploring how individuals and collectives relate to themselves and their surroundings, how they express peaces and conflicts 'within' and 'around', how they constantly transform throughout the flow of their lives. As a peace researcher, therefore, I live the fabric that I am researching. I am also alive. I also relate with myself and my surroundings, I also express peaces and conflicts 'within' and 'around', I also transform throughout the flow of my life. I can with this not pretend that my personal experiences do not influence, transform, fuel, and focus my ongoing research choices. On the contrary,



at the limit point I content that we can only know our topics within Peace Studies and we can only know each other to the extent to which we are prepared to know ourselves.

This implies breaking the taboo against being personally involved in the research process, yet I believe puts the process of knowing within Peace Studies back on its feet. Such knowing will then always be intimate, yet thereby no less relevant and maybe a bit more human (Koppensteiner in Echavarría Alvarez et al. 2018: 77).

One can with this purposefully make use of one's own embeddedness as a researcher to continuously help transform, enrich, and deepen the inquiry. Koppensteiner (2020, in Echavarría Alvarez et al. 2018) calls it to engage the 'researcher as (re)source', highlighting how (peace) researchers can tap into their personal experiences and engagements as vital resources and sources of information. Crucially however, this relational engagement needs to happen through a stance of continuously asking how one's embodied-relational presence can or cannot serve the research process and the people involved, applying an attitude of *selective authenticity* (Cohn 2009, Koppensteiner 2020: 75) to reflect upon when and in which contexts it is fruitful to authentically *and* selectively share and resonate through one's personal reflections and experiences. In relation to teaching and facilitation, US American peace educator Edward J. Brantmeier (2013: 99) discusses a similar notion of selective vulnerability, which I understand to be the process of daring to include imperfect humanness into the work (Tjersland 2022: 77). Knowing turns with this into a relational process of 'co-creation' (Brantmeier and McKenna 2020), which explores the multiple and often transformative encounters that can happen between literature, topic(s), questions, oneself, and research participants. It is furthermore, I contend, a valuable way to help shift some of the imbalanced power dynamics that are often present in research, unfolding one's researching self less as an 'invulnerable expert' and more as a contact boundary at work who engages processes of *not knowing* (Brantmeier and McKenna 2020, Koppensteiner 2020) to co-emerge knowing within a relational space. To phrase it more poetically: one becomes both a

dancer and a danced within a relational process of exploration that taps into what the research participants and oneself know - individually and together<sup>12</sup>.

It is nevertheless vital to recognize how this embodied focus and embedded approach to the research also comes with its distinct challenges, onto-epistemological assumptions, limitations, as well as potential blind-spots. It is for example a process of inquiry that emphasizes other forms of knowing as compared to the often ‘Western’-centric focus on (only) rational knowledge and quantifiable answers, privileging instead “the lived, messy body and its lived messy emotions (Leigh and Brown 2021: 75).” As such, it is an inquiry that underlines embodied experience and subjective meaning-making processes that research participants and researcher(s) (co)unfold, hence focusing “on the felt, the unspoken and the hard to capture as much as it does on words that are spoken (Leigh and Brown 2021: 83-84, see also Ellingson 2017). It therefore also implies an ongoing awareness of and care for both research participants and myself, as well as an ‘ever-unfurling’ (Leigh and Brown 2021: 80) process of (self)reflexivity regarding my own positionality and embeddedness *and* as regards the wider sociocultural and intersectional dynamics that might also (un)consciously make me (and others) privilege certain bodies on behalf of others and thus underline particular forms of bodily knowledge over others (Berila 2016, Ahmed 2012, Johnson D.H 2018). As Leigh and Brown expresses, “we need to know where we are looking *from* in order to critically analyse what we are looking *at* (Leigh and Brown 2021: 76. Emphasis in original).

It is in this context important to realize how I as a researcher need to stay flexible and open during this interview process to be able to authentically listen to and resonate with what the Open Floor teachers share rather than (un)consciously highlighting (only) my

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<sup>12</sup> One can with this furthermore say that I am inspired by an autoethnographic style of narrative inquiry, which is a research where the personally lived and the sociocultural are purposefully co-engaged (Ellis and Bochner 2000, Ellis 2003). However, I do not explicitly name it autoethnographic in this research because my main focus lies on what the Open Floor teachers share. Nevertheless, this underlying inspiration is visible in relation to many aspects that I personally resonate with and reflect upon throughout the research process.

preconceived ideas. I can therefore not apply a rigid structure and linear set of questions that without exceptions ‘have to be asked’ but need to engage a dynamic process that unfolds ‘just enough structure’ (Josselson 2013: xi) for the Open Floor teachers’ lived experiences to come forth. I build in this sense upon *elicitive approaches* - originally termed related to conflict transformation (Lederach 1995, Dietrich 2013) - to tap into resources and knowing already present with the research participants. I am hence, as touched upon, not the expert of what ‘ought’ to be said but the ‘spaceholder’ (Koppensteiner 2020) who helps guide the experiences that the Open Floor teachers bring into engagements that are meaningful for the research topic(s). My main task, therefore, is to, first, to “hold an open space for the participants’ voices and insights to emerge, and secondly, the aware and respectful treatment of those voices in the elaboration of the research findings (Koppensteiner 2020: 73).”

Koppensteiner discusses in this respect how all elicitive endeavors of facilitation - in research and beyond - necessitate spaces that are simultaneously flexible and bounded. He builds upon Lederach and Lederach (2010) to argue how openness allows different voices to emerge, whereas boundedness help create the structures and limits that are necessary for these voices to be safe-enough to express, amongst others through emerging dynamics of resonance (Koppensteiner 2020: 166-168). Josselson similarly contends how interviewing from a relational stance entails a research design that is both unstructured and bounded. The unstructured quality allows research participants’ experiences and stories to come forth while the bounded quality allows research participants to unfold experiences and stories that are relevant *in relation* to the research topic. Josselson writes:

the whole idea of planning the interview suggests that we must devise a structure for what we will invite our participants to talk about. But narrative interviewing is by design open-ended and unprescribed. The paradox of this approach is that the interview will be both unstructured *and* bounded. It will not be structured in the question-and-answer format that most people associate with interviews, but it will be bounded by our research question, which defines the terms of having the interview at all. (...) In the interest of being precise, our aim [as narrative researchers] is to investigate the wholeness of the person *in relation* to some aspect of his or her

experience - the aspect determined by the focus of our research (Josselson 2013: 35. Emphasis in original).

To manage this dynamic dance between openness and boundedness, I have designed an overall interview structure that includes main interview questions as well as potential sub questions (appendix 1). This structure is guided by what Josselson calls a ‘big Q question’ (Josselson 2013: 36-37), which is a question that is meant for me as the researcher rather than for the research participants to help me stay focused on the research intention without losing touch with flexibility and openness. My big Q question reads: *in which ways do long-term Open Floor practitioners (teachers) experience that they have transformed through practicing Open Floor?* During the interviews, I lean upon this structure that I have designed while also staying open for changing it, unfolding my questions more as guides than as musts. I therefore also at times pose the questions differently and in different sequences as well as ask different questions altogether during the interview process. Moreover, I supplement with additional questions whenever I intuit there is more to be known about a specific aspect, which Josselson calls to ‘ask more about’ or ‘extend’ the conversation in relation to interesting points (Josselson 2013: 66). For the sake of transparency, I sometimes include these questions that I ask alongside the experiences that the Open Floor teachers share during my discussion, especially when I understand these questions to emerge as particularly relevant or interesting related to my ongoing engagement.

#### **1.3.4 The Research Participants**

When it comes the specific research participants that I am interviewing, I include longer-term experiences with Open Floor. This is because processes of transformation, in difference from for example transposition, involve a deep systemic change that engage rather than surpass the underlying patterns and dynamics involved (Koppensteiner 2020: 48-49, Dietrich 2013: 7-10). Transformation therefore carries potentials to evolve new ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating that are radically embodied rather than merely thought and/or

ephemerally experienced, unfolding a felt shift and change that “influences all parts of the self (Koppensteiner 2020: 49). Seeing as Open Floor is a relatively new practice - it was founded in 2013/2014<sup>13</sup> - I consider for the time being Open Floor teachers to represent the best possibility for tapping into these longer-term experiences. All teachers need to have undergone a certain minimum hours of instructed embodiment practice to be accepted onto the Open Floor teacher-training program. When I applied for the teacher-training program in 2016, 125 of these hours had to be Open Floor particularly.

I emphasize how I also consider this possibility to engage with fellow Open Floor colleagues a vital opportunity to unfold my research even further. This is because the art of teaching often manifests as a meaningful practice in and by itself, emerging as an embodied art of ‘holding space’ (Koppensteiner 2020). Teaching can in this manner be both similar to and different from the practice dancing and moving, and the two practices tend to co-nourish and deepen each other. I therefore embrace transformative experiences from ‘both sides of the DJ table’ in this research, finding that the interplay between them can help deepen and enrich my exploration. Crucially however, I ask the teachers as contact boundaries at work who *also* teach rather than as ‘professional teaching roles, thus making the teachers’ *personal* experiences stand in the center and core of my engagement.

I acknowledge with this how the experiences that I thus tap into by interviewing Open Floor teachers - individuals who have committed time, energy, and finances to the practice - are, for the main part, so-called ‘positive’ experiences. This is natural, as the teachers would probably not have become teachers if Open Floor had not resonated with them in significant ways. I underline however how I do not consider this an influential limitation to the research but rather see it as a potential that I can tap into to engage, exactly, transformative *peace* experiences. As a side note moreover, this dynamic of mainly ‘positive’ experiences would

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<sup>13</sup> See chapter 3.1 for the history behind Open Floor.

probably also have been present had I interviewed other groups of long-term Open Floor practitioners, as most long-term practitioners tend to have their reasons for staying with and committing to a practice in any case.

As regards the process of selecting the research participants, I have included one main selection criterion. It reads: ‘Open Floor teachers or Open Floor teachers-in-training<sup>14</sup> (see appendix 1). From this, I have aspired to include a diversity of perspectives regarding what is currently - as of January 2021 - present within the approximately 250+ people group that Open Floor teachers are. I have in this respect invited the teachers personally instead of making an open call, basing my final choices upon personal knowledge of different Open Floor teachers/teachers-in-training as well as upon the self-written profiles that most graduated Open Floor teachers have authored on the Open Floor International homepage (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Find a Teacher’). I have in this context deliberated dynamics of diversity related to categories such as gender, sex, sociocultural surroundings of living/origin/teaching, race, language, age, field and focus of teaching, years of Open Floor experience, involvement in Open Floor International (the organization behind Open Floor), sexuality, neurodiversity, and (dis)abilities. My final selection of research participants does however not include a full range of diversity related to all the dynamics mentioned above. It is partly due to the, at times and in relation to certain dynamics more than others, currently ‘limited’ presence of diversity amongst Open Floor teachers<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore, it is related to my intention to include a balance between a more representative and a more diversified

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<sup>14</sup> Since Open Floor International had temporarily paused the teacher-training program for a while when I conducted the interviews in 2021 (to redefine and reshape the teacher-training after the first years as a new practice and organization), the few possible teachers-in-training who I might have interviewed would all have been at the very end of their training program. In the final composition of research participants however, all the teachers were fully graduated and this aspect is therefore ultimately of less relevance. I nevertheless mention it above because it was included in my original selection criterion.

<sup>15</sup> The ‘typical’ (if that can be said to exist) Open Floor teacher is a white, middle-aged woman living in either Europe or North America with English as her main language and with a fairly-well educational background. This description is importantly not based upon any in-depth research of the topic, as this research does not yet exist, but upon my personal observation and knowledge of the field, as well as upon the listing of teachers on the Open Floor International homepage (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Find a Teacher’). See also Tjersland and Borovica (2021) for an embodied attempt to engage some of these imbalanced dynamics of representation.

selection of perspectives, seeking to include perspectives that are *not* the current ‘majority’ *and* engage rather than the deny the current ‘majority’ that is. It is for example because of this that I have chosen to interview five who identify as women and two as men<sup>16</sup>.

Partly also, the aspect of not including a full range of diversity related to all the dynamics mentioned above relates to how I find some of these dynamics more pivotal to include. This makes other dynamics move into the background when different dynamics need to be prioritized against each other. I have in this sense found it particularly important to include diversity related to geography (to include more than only Western European and US American perspectives), field and focus of teaching (to involve diversity as regards which dynamics of Open Floor stand out as more or less important), as well as the amount of involvement in Open Floor International (to include a variety of perspectives related to the initial and continuous development of the practice and organization). My research is in this regard only a beginning exploration into a territory that has not yet been much researched upon<sup>17</sup>, standing as an initiatory expression that openly calls for being expanded and taken into future inquiries. These future inquiries can, I propose, include to engage different and/or more specific groups of Open Floor practitioners that what I have currently involved.

I have in total asked eight Open Floor teachers to participate in my inquiry. Out of these, seven have answered ‘yes’ while one has not responded. In the end therefore, I have interviewed seven Open Floor teachers. Due to the current overall composition of Open Floor teachers, most of them are in their late 40’s and beginning 50’s (5 participants) while one is younger (beginning 40’s) and one is older (mid 60’s). Five identify as women, two as men. I do not know all the nuances behind how the different teachers identify regarding race, yet I know that everyone expect one have a light skin tone. I also know that the one teacher with

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<sup>16</sup> Currently, under 20% of the teachers listed on the Open Floor International homepage identify as men (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Find a Teacher’).

<sup>17</sup> See also my discussion in chapter 1.4 regarding the limited amount of research that has currently been done on Open Floor as well as on the larger field of conscious dance and movement generally.

darker skin has explicitly experienced how it is to be categorized as ‘non-white’ while growing up during the South African apartheid regime. Currently, the teachers are based in US (California), Argentina (yet at times also in Texas, US), Israel, Sweden, Denmark<sup>18</sup>, Australia (with a Serbian background), and Belgium (with Indian ancestry, South African upbringing, and previously based in London). At least the following mother tongues are represented: English, Spanish, Hebrew, Danish, Swedish, and Serbian. At least one teacher lives in a same-sex relationship. All are graduated Open Floor teachers. One is a founder of Open Floor International while another is a founding member<sup>19</sup>. Four teachers (including the two just mentioned) work as volunteer working members of Open Floor International to help run and develop the organization. One is certified to include a focus on embodied sexuality (previously named Libido<sup>20</sup>) in their work, while another often includes what is called Art in Motion<sup>21</sup>. Another is trained as a therapist and qualifies to facilitate what in Open Floor is called Therapy in Motion<sup>22</sup>. Yet another teaches in academia besides Open Floor.

Obviously, this listing of categories and demographic markers can only provide a limited and incomplete picture of the full human beings who I have interviewed. By focusing upon categories in this manner, I miss the flesh, aliveness, and nuances of the unique stories, insights, and experiences that these Open Floor teachers bring. Furthermore, an increased focus on categorization can make me lean towards a detached and top-down relationship to

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<sup>18</sup> I have purposefully included two teachers from Scandinavia because I want to explore perspectives that are close to my own lived context. As I am as of yet the only Norwegian Open Floor teacher, Sweden and Denmark are in this regard the closest that I get.

<sup>19</sup> See chapter 3.1 for the difference between a ‘founder’ and a ‘founding member’.

<sup>20</sup> Libido, which is currently in the process of being renamed ‘embodied sexuality’ (as of April 2021), is a specific focus in Open Floor that revolves around exploring embodied dynamics of sexuality and ‘life force’ through dancing and moving. See Open Floor International 2018: ‘Our Curriculum. Libido’, chapter 3.4, as well as my introduction to the interview encounter with Imraan in chapter 4.4.

<sup>21</sup> Art in Motion is another focus in Open Floor that integrates different art modalities together with dancing and moving. It hence brings special attention to creative intelligence. Teachers that engage Art in Motion bring their expertise from other art fields into Open Floor. See Open Floor International 2018: ‘Our Curriculum. Art in Motion’, as well as chapter 3.4.

<sup>22</sup> Therapy in Motion is a way of working therapeutically with Open Floor. To conduct this work, one needs to be trained as a therapist from other accredited contexts in addition to training with Open Floor. See Open Floor International 2018: ‘Therapist Track. Open Floor Therapy in Motion’, chapter 3.4, as well as my introduction to the interview encounter with Marisu in chapter 4.2.



the research participants where I potentially end up seeing them closer to subjects that can ‘be researched upon’ instead of the full contact boundaries at work who they are. At the same time, being transparent about the different groups and contexts of people that I interview is essential for bringing attention to the contextualized dynamics of peaces (and conflicts) that I explore. I am therefore back at the simultaneous both-and awareness previously highlighted in relation to Murphy (in Echavarría Alvarez et al. 2018), finding it key to acknowledge categories and markers of demography *and* what lies beyond, between, and through (see also Tjersland and Borovica 2021). I have in this sense listed diverse categories and markers of demography above. In my main discussion, however, I move these categories and markers to the background and engage them only in the foreground whenever relevant and important. My core focus hence lies on the full embodied, complex, alive, and multifaceted human contact boundaries at work who these teachers are.

### **1.3.5 The Practical Interview Process**

As regards the process of practically doing the interviews, I re-emphasize how all of them happened via the online communication tool Zoom. It was originally due to great geographical distances between the research participants and I, as well as because all Open Floor teachers are familiarized with Zoom from before due to how it is being used in the Open Floor teacher-training program as well as for internal communication in Open Floor International. I could therefore, in an elicitive manner (Lederach 1995), lean upon a resource already present to facilitate the interview encounters. I highlight in this regard how my personal Zoom experience during the Open Floor teacher-training program always included a focus on embodied wholeness in our meetings. It happened for example through how we began each meeting with a guided meditation exercise designed to bring attention to different dynamics of our wholeness. We could in this sense engage our full contact boundaries at work also within the virtual space. In the interviews that I have conducted, I have similarly

started with a guided mediation exercise designed to invite embodied wholeness. Some paragraphs further down, I describe this meditation exercise in more detail.

Unknowingly to me while designing my research plan, the world was furthermore going through a global pandemic when the interviews took place. The reality of Covid-19 made, first, online interviewing become the only viable option and, second, had during the preceding year made online encounters become the new so-called ‘normal’. I therefore experienced how neither me nor the Open Floor teachers were particularly unfamiliar with conducting the interviews via Zoom when the interviews took place. Vital to acknowledge, however, the fact that both the teachers and I were, in different ways and in different places, going through a shared global crisis at the time of the interviews undeniably colored many of them and arose as a smaller or larger topic in several. For example, as both dancers/movers and teachers, we were influenced by how on-site dancing had, due to Covid-19, been either impossible or severely limited in most places for over a year. Many of the teachers who I interviewed had therefore moved much/all of their teaching online, while others, such as myself, had given dancing/moving and/or teaching a smaller or larger pause. Importantly, the (online) reality of Covid-19 and the yet-to-be-fully-known changes unfolding thereof is not the main focus of my research, yet it is a dynamic that I touch upon and engage if and when it arises as important within the different interview encounters.

To contact the research participants, I wrote them each an email (see appendix 2<sup>23</sup>) via the email address listed on the Open Floor International homepage. I highlighted in this respect how I was interested in their personal experiences as dancers and movers (as well as teachers) rather than their expert knowledge of the field. This was a way to help set the stage for lived experience and embodied narratives to come forth, as well as to be clear about what the teachers might say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to participating in. As a researcher oriented towards

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<sup>23</sup> Appendix 2 shows a standard draft of the email I sent, which I adapted to each research participant depending upon if and how they knew me and I knew them from before.

relational ethics (Josselson 2013), this clarification was key. Furthermore, I provided the teachers with some general questions to help elicit reflections as well as to serve as examples for what I might later ask them to share. I nonetheless made it clear to them how I would ask a variety of and potentially different questions during the interviews themselves.

What I did *not* describe in much detail in this email concerns how I as a researcher define peace as well as how I connect peaces to Open Floor. I did intentionally not focus on this aspect, as I wanted the Open Floor teachers to bring their experiences and reflections regardless of how I as a researcher might or might not define peace. Importantly, I wanted to avoid leading the teachers towards a particular field of ‘peace answers’ that they might interpret as being the (only) ‘right’ field to engage. I have in this regard, in different settings, often experienced how many tend to think about either inter/intrastate conflicts or visible dynamics of violence when I say that I am researching peace. During the interviews, I wanted these associations to not be the only ones available considering how I am researching a different, yet interconnected, fabric of embodied peaces. I therefore used the words ‘transformation’ and ‘change’ as the guiding threads. Nevertheless, as I have met many of the teachers in other Open Floor occasions (all except two), many of them have - in different ways and to different degrees - heard me talk about my research and the ways that I understand peaces before.

As the different Open Floor teachers answered ‘yes’ to participating in my research, we together agreed on a time to meet via Zoom. This ended up being between January 29, 2021 (first interview) and March 12, 2021 (last interview). In the process of agreeing upon an interview time, I moreover sent them an informed consent form (appendix 3), which I made it clear that they could ask any questions about before deciding to sign. When we met for our online meeting, I furthermore repeated my main interview intention - to ask them about their *personal* Open Floor experiences - and (re)explained, as written in the informed consent

form, how I would record the interviews via the Zoom video and voice recording, as well as take handwritten notes. Finally, I went through the interview structure before I asked the teachers if they had any further questions to me before we together commenced.

From here, I started each interview with a guided mediation exercise. I drew upon the Open Floor curriculum, bringing attention to different dimensions of embodiment and different dynamics of relationality<sup>24</sup>. Noticeably, the relational dynamics that I tapped into are slightly different from what the Open Floor curriculum expresses, as I wanted to include even further relational nuances. It involves, amongst others, families, neighborhoods, communities, societies, a global world, and ‘something larger’<sup>25</sup>. I began in this sense by highlighting how the Open Floor teacher and I were connected in the here and now - from different places yet together via a screen. From here, I moved to the embodied and relational dynamics mentioned, inviting each teacher to become curious about how these dynamics might be present with them here and now as well as how these dynamics might also become different in the future. This is consistent with the previously mentioned Open Floor value *move & include*<sup>26</sup>. To highlight this procedural aspect even further, I closed each meditation exercise by bringing attention back to where it started: to the Open Floor teacher and I connected in the here and now - from different places yet together via a screen. I know how at least I landed differently into this space each time anew after having moved through the mediation exercise. Finally, before I started the Zoom voice and video recording, I invited the teachers to open their eyes whenever they were ready as a sign that we could together start the more formal interview process. This process, as well as the questions involved, have previously been discussed in chapter 1.3.3 (see also appendix 1).

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<sup>24</sup> See chapter 3.3.2 for a deeper explanation of these parts of the Open Floor curriculum.

<sup>25</sup> In Open Floor, ‘something larger’ is expressed as the ‘hunger for spirit’. In my teaching however, I often use the more open-ended phrase ‘something larger’, finding that this phrase can include a broader range of people regardless of how ‘something larger’ is named in different religions, spiritualities, cultures, and languages.

<sup>26</sup> See chapter 1.1.3.

After completing the formal interview part, I closed each interview by reminding the teachers about how they have the right to withdraw - fully or partially - at any point until publication. This is a vital aspect of relational ethics that, although written in the informed consent form, I wanted to re-highlight while we were (virtually) present together. Furthermore, I asked them if they had any additional questions to me before I allowed them to choose whether they wanted me to use their real name or another name in my writings. All except one opted for their real name being used. In my main engagement in chapter 4, I do not make any expressed distinction between when I am using a real name and when I am using a different name, seeing this as a fruitful way to respect each teacher's choice without singling out the one who opted for another name being applied.

### **1.3.6 The Endeavor of Interpretation and the Process of Re-Narrating Interview Material**

As a final methodological aspect, I discuss the interpretive lens that I apply to engage the interview material after the interviews have taken place as well as the dynamics involved in re-narrating the material into meaningful research texts. I build in this sense upon what Josselson calls 'hermeneutics of restoration' - based on Paul Ricoeur's (1970, 1981) 'hermeneutics of faith' - which is the interpretive effort to understand a story and narrative as a research participants' best and sincere efforts to convey their experiences and meaning-making processes. I thus take an interpretive leap of faith and *believe* that the research participants can and are willing to share "as best they are able, their sense of their subjective experience and meaning making (Josselson 2004: 5)." I do in other words *actively* look for the meanings that the Open Floor teachers express, purposefully assuming that they are both the experts of their experience and, to the best of their abilities, willing to share what needs to be shared.

My choice of interpretive lens is fundamentally intertwined with my humanistic and elicitive research approach. I find in this context that hermeneutics of restoration help me

approach the interview material from a ground of embracing, integrating, and engaging rather than primarily doubting or decoding the many complexities, experiences, and meaning-making processes that they involve. It does therefore not unfold as a critical deconstruction of experience but as a deep listening to and resonance with embodied life. Nevertheless, hermeneutics of restoration do not mean to naively believe that all layers of an experience are necessarily made visible and spoken on a tangible level (Josselson 2004). Rather, dynamics of living can lie deeper and move in different shapes than what a research participant is able to know or convey within a specific moment and context. The difference from what Josselson calls ‘hermeneutics of demystification’, however, lies in how I stay aware of and engage these many meaning-making processes without seeking to ‘decode’ or ‘demystify’ them. Instead, I bring attention to diverse movements of complexity through an attitude of empathically and compassionately resonating with these movements as they unfold. Josselson confirms:

meanings [in hermeneutics of restoration] are taken as relatively transparent although many researchers using this perspective explicitly recognize that interpretation occurs at every stage of the analysis. Putting aside the problems inherent in knowing another and the fact that the eye of the beholder always constructs what is seen, that the person and social location of the researcher influences what is told, that there will always be gaps and partial truths as well as power dynamics, the aim is nevertheless to understand the Other as [one understands oneself] (Josselson 2004: 5-6).

Josselson (2004, 2011) describes how this interpretive endeavor of restoration is based upon the hermeneutic circle. It implies that the process of interpretation moves through three intertwined cycles where “an understanding of the whole illuminates the parts, which in turn create the whole (Josselson 2011: 226).” It includes 1) “gaining an overall sense of meaning [of the research material] (...),” 2) “examining the parts in relation to [this overall sense of meaning] (...),” and 3) “changing our understanding of the whole [out of the examination of the parts] until we arrive at a holistic understanding that best encompasses the meanings of the parts (Josselson 2011: 228).” In the main chapter 4, I engage this three-fold

process of interpretation by 1) listening for and engaging the overall meaning(s) that emerge within each interview encounter, 2) exploring the different parts of this interview in relation to the overall meaning(s) observed, and 3) allowing these parts to together unfold a whole that is different from and perhaps lies deeper than the first whole encountered. I moreover engage the different interviews together and through each other if and when topics that touch arise, emerging new wholes out of and through what the research participants co-express. I therefore also lean upon the before discussed principle of correspondence to acknowledge how the experiences that the Open Floor teachers share are, on the one hand, fully unique expressions that cannot be used to claim universal dynamics and answers *and*, on the other hand, intertwined movements that reverberate into a larger, shared web of embodied interconnection.

When it comes to the process of re-narrating the interview material into meaningful research texts, I build upon an understanding that is argued by several narrative inquirers. It concerns how narrative research is not a word-by-word rendering of what a research participant has said but an ongoing process of interpretation as researchers re-narrate the material into texts that make sense (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, Josselson 2011, Kim 2016). Clandinin and Connelly express it as the experience of ‘being in the midst’ within “a nested set of stories (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 144),” which involves research participants, the researcher(s), as well as research topic(s) and question(s). As a narrative inquirer, therefore, one is never separate from the experiences that are being shared but continuously part of and embedded into the interview situation in which the telling occurs. One is hence, as Clandinin and Connelly articulates it, living a dual experience of research. “The narrative researcher’s experience is always a dual one, always the inquirer experiencing the experience and also being a part of the experience itself (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 81).” As a narrative inquirer, one therefore needs to honor, engage, and (inter)connect a

multiplicity of voices and meaning-making processes, rendering one to, nothing more and nothing less, compose “a [research] text that at the same time looks backward and forward, looks inward and outward, and situates the experiences within place (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 140).” Integrating this complexity without reducing it is, I affirm, the challenge, potential, and art involved in narrative research. It is curiously also, I propose, the challenge, potential, and art involved within an embodied peace web.

According to Kim, one way that this complex sense-making endeavor can be approached is through engaging a process of ‘narrative smoothing’ (Kim 2016: 191-193). It involves choosing certain focuses and omitting others based upon what wants and needs to be told. Narrative smoothing is in this sense a much-used tool for storytelling in research and beyond, helping one to unfold a story that is coherent and understandable enough for listeners and readers to follow. It can however also fall into the trap of becoming ‘too smooth’ by missing the complexities, ambiguities, and paradoxes involved (Kim 2016: 192-193). I am therefore conscious about not becoming overly ‘smooth’ in this research, wanting to engage rather than bypass the imperfect, multifaceted, and paradoxical fabric that I explore. I hence consider a dynamic balance between coherency and complexity when I attempt to stay true to what the research participants express *and* engage narrative changes as I move into a written research form. One way that this balancing dance can be done is through writing the interview transcriptions as accurate as possible. Out of these as-accurate-as-possible transcriptions, I re-narrate the interview material in manners that sometimes quotes exact words as well as non-verbal expressions<sup>27</sup> and that sometimes re-narrates what was shared in different yet authentic ways. This becomes particularly relevant related to two interview encounters that I have conducted in the mother tongues of the research participants and I - Danish and Swedish (research participants) and Norwegian (me). In these instances, I need to

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<sup>27</sup> As mentioned, I have both voice and video recording of the interviews.



take added dynamics of translation into consideration, acknowledging how several phrases, expressions, and words cannot be directly translated. I aim in this sense to provide translations that honor the original Danish/Swedish/Norwegian meanings rather than primarily their literal words, sometimes also articulating dynamics related to how I as a researcher experience and reflect upon these language dynamics as the interviews unfold.

As a final aspect to highlight, German-Russian (Kazakhstani) peace researcher Christina Pauls contends how one of the “central ethical difficulties of data analysis concern ownership and representation, as I [the researcher] am in a privileged position to elicit, interpret and analyze the narratives (Pauls 2021: 43).” I similarly emphasize how it is crucial to keep my research positionality in mind, especially when it comes to interpretive power. It is after all I who design, conduct, and write the inquiry. According to Pauls, one small and incomplete way that some of these (imbalanced) dynamics can begin to be shifted is through letting “the [research] participants re-read my analysis before submission, so that they can assess and comment on my interpretation of their narratives (Pauls 2021: 43).” I have in a comparable vein sent my discussion to each of the Open Floor teachers after writing it, allowing them to make comments, suggest changes, as well as ask any questions that they might have. In line with Pauls, I have moreover done my “best to incorporate their comments and adjust the text accordingly (Pauls 2021: 43).” Sometimes, this part of the research has resulted in added perspectives and reflections concerning certain topics and dynamics while it at other times has resulted in clarifying changes being made to my discussion or to the research participants’ quotes. As regards the latter, I have included a footnote at the beginning of the interview whenever changes have been made to direct quotes, which has only happened on the request of a research participant themselves.

## 1.4 Overview of Key Research Literature

At the end of the chapter, I provide a general overview of the main literature that I make use of throughout the inquiry. I do it to highlight the core literary landscape of my research, which helps guide and shape the different directions that my inquiry takes. Open Floor International emphasizes in this respect how “everything is a remix, and everyone is unique (Open Floor International 2017: 4).” It implies that even though all humans and processes are always particular they also rest upon a shared field of those who have moved before. Similarly, although my research is unique and carries its distinct focuses, questions, and explorations, it also emerges out of a shared field of knowledge that is already manifested and expressed. To honor and make visible this foundational field of knowing, I engage a guiding overview as regards the main literature that I, to paraphrase Open Floor International, creatively ‘remix’ in this research. It is hence not yet an in-depth discussion of theories and authors but a general overview and map. In this sense, I understand peace research to emerge as a fundamentally transdisciplinary endeavor (Koppensteiner 2020: 78-80). I therefore place myself as ‘unapologetically eclectic’ (Ellingson 2017: 3), as I draw upon a wide variety of authors and fields to explore Open Floor and an embodied peace web.

When it comes to peace research, one of my core inspirations is, as highlighted, the transrational peace philosophy as developed at the Unit for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Innsbruck, Austria. I have in this context underlined how one of the main reasons why I am inspired by this philosophy concerns how it helps me emphasize peaces as a wholeness-oriented web. In this regard, *Wolfgang Dietrich* is the founding scholar behind the transrational approach. His main body of work can be found in the *Many Peaces* trilogy (Dietrich 2012, 2013, 2018) where he explores how peaces are and have been engaged throughout a variety of historical and cultural contexts (see also Dietrich et al. 2014). Out of this, he proposes a transrational peace understanding that seeks to both integrate and

differentiate a multiplicity of aspects and dynamics (Dietrich 2012). He furthermore explores how this transrational peace understanding calls for an elicitive approach to peace and conflict work (Dietrich 2013), with the term ‘elicitive’ - originally coined by Lederach (1995) - referring to peace and conflict transformation approaches that build upon the inherent resources and knowledge of the parties involved rather than upon imposing solutions from ‘without’. Lastly, Dietrich outlines a transrational tool for mapping conflicts - elicitive conflict mapping (ECM) - which underlines how conflicts are multifaceted and relational processes that need to be continuously engaged in holistic manners for new homeostatic balances - peaces - to emerge (Dietrich 2018).

A work that expands this transrational approach into embodied realms of peace research and facilitation is *Norbert Koppensteiner's* (2009, 2020, in Echavarría Alvarez et al. 2018) ‘self as (re)source’. Koppensteiner explores how the (transrational) self of the person, researcher, and/or facilitator can be tapped into as a holistic, relational, and dynamic resource and source of information in the process of unfolding peaces, understandings, as well as ongoing endeavors of transformation. In this manner, he provides a meaningful window into how the personal and the collective, the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’, co-unfold. Particularly interesting is furthermore how one of the practices that Koppensteiner keeps returning to as a tool for tapping into and unfolding this transrational self is conscious dance and movement, through the 5Rhythms practice. In addition, Brazilian peace researcher *Paula Ditzel Facci* (2020) moves the transrational approach even deeper into dance and movement explicitly, exploring how dance and movement can be engaged to unfold ‘inner-outer’ dynamics of peaces and conflict transformation. I find in this respect that her writings are especially interesting in terms of how they highlight both similar and different potentials of dance and movement than what I explore. Moreover, I underline two other works that spring from the associates/faculty of the Unit for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Innsbruck.

They are: *Transrational Resonances* (Echavarría Alvarez et al. 2018) as well as a special issue focused on transrational perspectives published in the *Journal of Peace Education* co-edited by Ditzel Facci and myself (Tjersland and Ditzel Facci 2019). Both these works highlight how transrational approaches can be engaged in different contexts and be reflected upon from different perspectives rather than in one-dimensional manners.

Moving to other peace scholars who are also important inspirations behind the transrational peace philosophy underlined, I emphasize the before-mentioned *John Paul Lederach* (1995, 2005, 2014, Lederach and Lederach 2010). Lederach is, as mentioned, the original scholar behind the term ‘elicitive’ (Lederach 1995) and is an author who greatly inspire my reflections and ideas when it comes peaces. In *The Moral Imagination* (Lederach 2005) and *When Blood and Bones Cry Out* - the latter written together with his daughter *Angela Jill Lederach* (Lederach and Lederach 2010) - Lederach (and Lederach) engage(s) deeply poetic, aesthetic, and artful writing to emphasize the relational and holistic nature of peaces, transformation, (social) healing, and reconciliation. He and they thus call for a process of ‘metaphorical shifts’ to help nourish and unfold more non-linear, relational, and multidimensional approaches within the field. A core aspect concerns in this respect how Lederach and Lederach (2010) underline the crucial importance of life-affirming relational containers within peace and conflict settings, helping individuals and collectives unfold more transformative spaces of love, acceptance, care, belonging, and more.

*Francisco A. Muñoz*’ (2006) notion of ‘imperfect peace’ is another key source of inspiration. Muñoz can be credited with unfolding an epistemological twist in peace research, bringing attention to peaces as an ‘unfinished and procedural’ web that deserves attention on its own terms rather than merely as the ‘opposite of conflicts’. *Vicent Martínez Guzmán*’s (2005) idea that ‘yes, we humans can and know how to make peaces’ (Spanish: *podemos hacer las paces*) similarly introduces a seemingly simple yet revolutionary shift, proposing

how humans do not only know how to be conflictive and violent but also carry vital potentials for peaces. *Adam Curle* is another key scholar who can probably be credited for being an inspiration behind most of the authors mentioned. His writings, which can be found in *Adam Curle. Radical Peacemaker* (Woodhouse and Lederach 2016), pioneers amongst others an understanding for how the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ correspond, basing himself upon a deeply relational approach to bring attention to how the ‘inner’ life of the peace worker matters, as well as to how connectivity, interconnectedness, love, and more are essential qualities for peaces and conflict transformation.

When it comes to the ‘disembodied’ onto-epistemological that I explore - the so-called Cartesian ‘mind-body’ split and its lived, embodied consequences - I engage directly with *René Descartes*’ (2017ab) writings as well as with authors who discuss his philosophies from a more ‘outside’ perspective. Particularly, I highlight US American professor of philosophy *Gary Hatfield’s* (2014) informative discussion of Descartes, amongst others related to the background and context out of which Descartes wrote. As I am seeking to engage a transformative understanding of rather than merely criticize the ‘disembodied’ onto-epistemological heritage that I explore, this contextualization is key. Furthermore, *Mary Midgley* (2001) argues how one of the main lived implications that emerges out of this Cartesian mind-body heritage is an (un)conscious atomistic tendency to separate oneself and the world into dichotomist and incompatible ‘parts’. Furthermore, there is a tendency to valorize these ‘parts’ into a (un)conscious hierarchical system that emphasizes ‘mind’, ‘masculine’, ‘rational’, and ‘science’ over ‘body’, ‘feminine’, ‘feeling/intuitive’, and ‘art’ - amongst other categories. This combination of dichotomies and hierarchies is in this sense, I affirm, a core component of ‘disembodiment’ that I base much of my exploration upon.

Highlighting with this other perspectives that help me engage how this ‘disembodied’ tendency is, in the end, not the only possibility, I emphasize US American feminist physicist

and theorist *Karen Barad's* (2007) notion of 'ontoepistemology' (as well as 'ethico-onto-epistemology'). This term accentuates, as underlined, how epistemology and ontology (as well as ethics) are not separated but entangled, emphasizing how processes knowing and being are fundamentally inseparable. According to Barad, this inseparability manifests as a lived "practice of intra-acting with the world as part of the world in its dynamic material configuring, its ongoing articulation (Barad 2007: 379)." *Arturo Escobar* (2020) furthermore brings this onto-epistemological entanglement into the Zapatista notion of 'a world in which many worlds fits' - the pluriverse - adding a crucial decolonial perspective as regards how the 'disembodied' and, I affirm, 'Western'-centric onto-epistemological heritage that I explore is not the only option. Rather, "Another Possible is Possible (Escobar 2020: 1)" and this possible can highlight the world as a "web formed of interwoven lines and threads, always in motion (Escobar 2020: 26)." Such a dynamic and interconnected understanding is, I underline, a vital *embodied* perspective that I draw upon throughout the research endeavor - in relation to Escobar and beyond.

The before-mentioned theories of *George Lakoff* and *Mark Johnson* (1980, 1999, Johnson 2007) concerning embodied metaphorical structures that help 'hide and highlight' (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 10-13) diverse aspects of a concept and consequently help shape how individuals and collectives experience and engage these concepts in their lives, is moreover vital. Together with *Daniel Siegel's* (2011) discussion of an integrated and two-directional bottom-up and top-down flow of information, these theories help highlight how thinking and experiencing, as well as knowing and being/becoming, are not separate but co-manifesting. Siegel is furthermore relevant related to his exploration of multiple processes involved in embodied wholeness, particularly his model of 'the window of tolerance' (Siegel 2011: 137-140), which I engage to help shine light upon how individuals and collectives can learn to stay present with - 'tolerate' - a wider variety and intensity of experience without

getting overwhelmed. In addition, *Alan Fogel* (2009) provides a helpful overview as regards multiple processes involved embodied wholeness, which also includes the before-engaged processes of embodied and conceptual self-awareness.

In neuroscience, I encounter further intriguing perspectives as regards what embodied wholeness includes. US based Portuguese neuroscientist *Antonio R. Damasio* (1994, 2008) discusses for example the interconnected relationship between feeling and thinking - naming one of his books *Descartes' Error* (Damasio 1994) - while the discovery of mirror neurons made by a group of Italian researchers (Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia 2008, Gallese 2003) highlights the embodied roots of empathy and thus brings attention to the interweaving between embodiment and relationality. Canadian psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, and researcher *Norman Doidge* (2007) conducts in turn research on brain plasticity, underlining amongst others how humans carry potentials *both* to transform throughout their lives *and* to, through what Doidge calls 'the plastic paradox' (Doidge 2007: xvi), create deeply entrenched patterns that rigidly resist any change at all. US American professor of psychiatry *Stephen W. Porges'* (2011, 2017, 2022) furthermore highlights the importance of feeling safe enough through his polyvagal theory, emphasizing how it is much easier for individuals and groups to keep learning, transforming, and co-creating when they can access a sufficiently felt sense of (relational) safety. Building on these and other neuroscientific insights, Canadian political theorist *Emily Beausoleil* and New Zealand interdisciplinary scholar on conflict transformation and arts *Michelle LeBaron* (2013) bridge neuroscience with dance and conflict transformation explicitly, exploring how perspectives from neuroscience can help shine light onto how dance can be used as a method for conflict transformation (see also LeBaron et al. 2013). Finally, as a critical engagement of the perspectives above, Spanish peace researchers *Sonia París Albert* and *Irene Comins Mingol* (2013) warn against engaging these neuroscientific insights without also reflecting upon their potential limitations, amongst

others related to a possible oversimplification of embodied complexity as well as to a (un)conscious ‘Western’-centric bias that they might involve. They therefore help highlight how neuroscience is neither the only nor a universal answer to the embodied-relational dance that I explore but perspectives that can help highlight relevant and interesting dynamics.

In terms of the embodiment of trauma, *Bessel van der Kolk* (2014) underlines how trauma moves in the body. Together with US American psychologist *Peter A. Levine’s* (2010, Levine and Frederick 1997) discussions of humans’ embodied capacities to complete trauma cycles and heal, his work provides crucial insights into how individuals and collectives react in *embodied* (rather than purely ‘mental’) manners to overwhelming experiences. US American therapist focused on interpersonal neurobiology *Bonnie Badenoch* (2017) furthermore expands this embodied approach to underline the relational component involved in both the emergence and the healing of trauma, highlighting how “the essence of trauma isn’t events, but aloneness within them (Badenoch 2017: 25).” In addition, African American anti-racist author *Resmaa Menakem* (2021) adds his embodied insights on (transgenerational) trauma, especially connected to a racialized US context, accentuating how different bodies - particularly white, black, and police bodies in Menakem’s writings - are impacted by and embody trauma in different ways. Finally, to help shine light upon how humans can move from diverse sensations of threat, danger, and overwhelm - whether it is felt as trauma or not - into more open, co-creative, and life-affirming ways of engaging, I highlight *Brené Brown’s* (2012, 2017) explorations of vulnerability, shame, and belonging, US American professor of psychology *Geoffrey L. Cohen’s* (2022) discussion of belonging in relation to what he calls ‘situation-crafting’, as well as Ethiopian born US based Buddhist teacher *Sebene Selassie’s* (2020) insights on belonging, especially related to a US American racialized context.

In addition to this, I draw upon perspectives from ‘Eastern’ spiritual/religious traditions that help shine light onto ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating that are



radically different from the ‘disembodied’ onto-epistemological heritage that I commence the research out of. I emphasize especially the work of Chinese born British writer *Jean C. Cooper* (1981, 2010) related to Taoism and the Taoist symbol *yin-yang*, having already drawn upon this symbol to help explain how I understand embodiment as a paradoxical process of wholeness. Furthermore, I discuss authors who engage Buddhist principles and philosophies. Many of them are, I acknowledge, US American Buddhists authors and teachers, which is both a limitation to my research and can also be understood as natural in terms of how these ‘Western’ authors might be grappling with similar questions, tensions, and processes related to ‘disembodiment’ that I do. They include, amongst others, *Mark Epstein* (1995) and his discussion of a Buddhist sense of self as emerging through a relational process of perpetual transformation rather than as a static and individual essence, *Tara Brach* and her mindful and transformative practices of *Radical Acceptance* (Brach 2003) and *Radical Compassion* (Brach 2019), *Jack Kornfield’s* (2008) and *Phillip Moffitt’s* (2008) rendering of pain and suffering as unfolding through two qualitatively different processes in human lives, *Pema Chödrön* (2017) and her inspiring engagement with how one can live through deeply challenging situations through a radical move of going towards rather than away from suffering and pain, as well as *Tsultrim Allione* (2008) and her comparable ‘inner’ practice of befriending rather than waging war against the ‘parts’ of oneself that one considers ‘unwanted’ and ‘bad’. Furthermore, Vietnamese Buddhist monk, teacher, and peace activist *Thich Nhat Hanh’s* provides his deeply touching reflections regarding a socially engaged form of Buddhism that, amongst others, builds upon unconditional love (Hanh 2006), radical interconnectedness - ‘interbeing’ (Hanh 2017) - and a way of *Being Peace* (Hanh 1987) that encourages compassion, understanding, empathy, and (re)connection rather than (further) separation. From a Sikh perspective, US American filmmaker, activist, lawyer, and educator with an Indian family background, *Valarie Kaur* (2022), similarly

emphasizes a practice of ‘revolutionary love’. She does not understand this love to emerge as a naïve and responsibility-negating dynamic but as a challenging act of engaging ‘love as labor’ (Kaur 2022: xxii) to honestly and compassionately see both oneself and others as interconnected also in one’s anger, one’s pain, and one’s hurt. Although I find that these two latter perspectives can be deeply challenging to practice and live within a complex embodied existence, I find them immensely inspiring as regards how a lived processes of embodied engagement can unfold in relational, wholeness-oriented, and transformative manners.

Nevertheless, this connection-focused process of embodied transformation emphasized above can importantly not unfold if it not also engaged through a critical lens regarding structural and systemic dynamics of power, exclusion, discrimination, oppression, and more. I therefore also engage perspectives that can help me highlight such an awareness, focusing upon a vital question for this inquiry: ‘which bodies are and are not included, are and are not valued, are and are not seen, are and are not and heard?’ US American Black feminist scholar *Kimberle Crenshaw* (1989) has in this regard coined the term ‘intersectionality’, which refers to a system of interrelated social identities that are affected by privileges and oppressions in a variety of ways. I importantly draw upon this notion beyond its original Black feminist context (see also Taylor 2017, hooks 1984) to engage how a variety of bodies are affected by and embedded into diverse and intertwining categories of difference. Furthermore, I emphasize US American professor of English and comparative literature *Michael Rothberg’s* (2019) figure of *The Implicated Subject*, which helps me bring attention to how individuals and collectives can benefit from and be part of harmful structures even when they do not agree with these structures, intend to be part of them, and/or are not the direct agent(s)/creator(s) of harm. Seen together with US American and British peace education researchers *Kevin Kester* and *Hilary Cremin’s* (2017) discussion of ‘second-order reflexivity’ - which emphasizes a process where researchers (and others) do not only

reflect upon individual positions of privilege and bias but also a larger, second-order situation of how a field might collectively be part of reproducing “the very conditions it attempts to mitigate (Kester and Cremin 2017: 1420)” - this figure can help me recognize how both my personal positionalities as well as the larger positionalities that I am part of through the fields that I engage - especially peace research and Open Floor - matter. I have furthermore co-authored an article together with Australian based Serbian researcher and Open Floor teacher *Tamara Borovica* where we have taken this notion of second and first order reflexivity into an engagement with Open Floor specifically (Tjersland and Borovica 2021). In this context, we bring attention to how our many-faceted embodied identities - both as teachers and as part of a collective Open Floor - help shape our ongoing abilities to invite or to not invite more authentic possibilities for inclusion and diversity in the practice and organization.

Moving with this to engage sources that discuss dance/movement and Open Floor particularly, I emphasize literature that discuss dance and movement generally as well as, due to a gap in existing literature, other forms of sources that describe Open Floor. Moreover, I highlight authors who help situate Open Floor within a certain sociocultural-historical context. *Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's* (1999) discussion of *The Primacy of Movement* highlights in this sense how humans are ‘animate forms’; beings who become who they are, know what do, and relate in the manners that they unfold because of *the ways that they move*. Movement, therefore, is not only an interesting field to engage but a basis of embodied existence. *Kimerer L. LaMothe* (2015) highlights in turn a similar perspective in her book *Why We Dance*, particularly interesting in terms defining dance (and movement) as an active participation in “the *rhythms of bodily becoming* (LaMothe 2015: 6. Emphasis in original).” Furthermore, US American author and political activist *Barbara Ehrenreich* (2007) explores dance and communal celebration as a political process of collective joy, focusing on dance and movement related to its emancipatory and community building potentials.

When it comes to Open Floor, it becomes as mentioned more difficult to encounter literature due to how Open Floor is a relatively young practice that has not yet been much researched upon. I have rightly myself produced an article that discusses Open Floor related to peace education (Tjersland 2019), yet other than that literature is hard to come across. Because of this, I become creative in my search for information. Amongst others, I base my exploration upon the unpublished *teacher-training manual* that was used when I attended the Open Floor teacher-training program (Open Floor International 2017), as well as upon the *Open Floor International webpage* (Open Floor International 2018). I furthermore tap into my personal experience as an Open Floor teacher as well as my ongoing engagement with the field, which includes a newsletter and a closed Facebook group for Open Floor teachers<sup>28</sup>. These two latter sources help me stay updated on potential changes and developments in the Open Floor curriculum as well as the Open Floor International organization. I underline in this respect how this gap in literature that I encounter is not only a challenge for the research but also a confirmation for how I am exploring a hitherto largely uncharted territory for academia. Yet, to tap into an even deeper field of knowledge, I also make use of two additional online conversations that I have had with one of the founders - *Kathy Altman* (2020) - and a founding member - *Geordie Jahner* (2020) - of Open Floor International. These conversations are not the same as the narrative interviews that I conduct with other Open Floor teachers but are meant to help illuminate factual aspects of Open Floor that I cannot otherwise encounter due to a lack of literature. I have therefore not engaged these conversations in the methodology section of the research but highlight them here as part of the literature overview. I do however underline how both Jahner and Altman have been informed about my intention with the conversations and they have both also consented to our

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<sup>28</sup> Towards the end of the inquiry (Winter 2021/2022), also a new online platform was internally launched for Open Floor teachers where potential curriculum changes are continuously updated. Since it arrived very late in the research rather than during the main process of exploration, I have used this platform only to double-check if curriculum has changed since I have written my discussion rather than as a main source of information.

conversations being quoted from. Research ethics related to (expert) interviewing therefore still apply even if I do not formally phrase these conversations as interview encounters.

To help situate Open Floor in a certain sociocultural-historical context, I emphasize British sociologist and expert on comparative religion *Elizabeth Puttick's* (2000) account of a simultaneous pull towards secularization and spiritualization in the Human Potential Movement, as well as US American professor of sociology and religion *Marion Goldman's* (2012) exploration of spiritual privilege in the context of the Esalen Institute. Both the Esalen Institute and the Human Potential Movement are important contexts to be aware of when it comes to Open Floor. Furthermore, I highlight *Gabrielle Roth's* (1998ab) writings on her 5Rhythms practice - Roth is, as mentioned, the founder of the 5Rhythms - which, as touched upon, is a crucial influence behind Open Floor. Lastly, *Andrea Juhan* (2003) - one of the founders of Open Floor International - has written a doctoral dissertation named 'Open Floor: Dance, Therapy, and Transformation through the 5Rhythms'. This dissertation is however not about Open Floor in its current main format but about a specific form that has later been developed into what is now called 'Open Floor Encounter'. This can in many ways be said to be part of Juhan's professional transition from the 5Rhythms practice and into Open Floor. It therefore brings attention to vital influences that later came to be embedded within Open Floor, especially as regards Juhan's previous and extensive experience in the 5Rhythms practice as well as within humanistic and body-oriented approaches to psychotherapy.

As a final field to highlight, I underline literature that engage storytelling and narrative approaches to research. *Lewis Mehl-Madrona* (2005) focuses, as engaged, upon storytelling related to processes of healing and transformation, discussing the difference between stories that heal and stories that keep stuck in disconnection and pain. *Inger Lise Oelrich* (2014) engages in turn storytelling related to (re)connective peace work, providing intriguing perspectives onto the interconnections between storytelling and peace. *D. Jean*

*Clandinin* and *F. Michael Connelly* (2000, Connelly 2006) furthermore provide foundational perspectives onto narrative research, which also *Jeong-Hee Kim* (2016) expands upon. As a main methodological source for practically *doing* this narrative inquiry, moreover, I lean, as mentioned, upon *Ruthellen Josselson's* relational approach to interviewing (Josselson 2013) as well as her insights concerning hermeneutic and narrative processes of interpretation (Josselson 2004, 2011). I find that her writings help me engage a fundamentally relational, holistic, and potentially transformative approach to the process of conducting the interviews as well as the process of interpreting and discussing the interview material. Lastly, *Eugene Gendlin* (2007, 1997, 2004) valuable discussion of the ongoing interplay between words and the felt sense helps me bring attention to how words and language do not need to be engaged as the 'opposite' of embodied engagement but can be tapped into as affirmative participants within a wholeness-oriented manner of being, becoming, knowing, and relating. As regards my embodied-oriented research inquiry, this perspective is highly inspirational.

# **ENTER**

*I move*

*allowing the beat to  
charge my vessels*

*a nudge, a pull  
an inclination towards  
here  
not there*

*my legs carrying me  
my lungs breathing me  
my heart unfolding me  
I notice*

*I follow the dance and I  
meet  
the questions*

*the trajectory is unfolding*

*I move*

## Chapter 2: Dynamics of a ‘Disembodied Self’

In this second chapter of the research, I begin my exploration from an intriguing question: how do I, as an embodied whole, experience and understand myself and the world? The answers I give to this question are crucial. They influence, as emphasized, not only how I experience and relate to myself but also inform how I act upon and relate to my surroundings (see Barad 2007, Lehner 2022, Escobar 2020). In other words, the answers I give to this question help shape the ever-changing ‘inner-outer’ reality that I engage as a contact boundary at work. In chapter 1, I initiated a first discussion of a possible *embodied* realm of answers to be unfolded out of this question. Although I am yet to engage in-depth with the multiple dynamics involved, my discussion revealed a beginning understanding of embodiment as a process of *paradoxical wholeness* and *relationality*. In this chapter, I look at the seeming ‘opposites’ of this embodied realm, engaging ‘disembodied’ dynamics that move ‘within’ and ‘around’. I hence explore a core metaphorical dynamic that emerges out of a so-called Cartesian-inspired, ‘disembodied’ onto-epistemological heritage, which revolves around how this heritage tends to separate embodied wholes into *distinct, static, and hierarchical ‘parts’*, and, extending out of this, tends to conceptualize humans (and other beings) as *individuals only* and thus as largely independent from their surroundings.

Transrationally speaking, I engage with this a movement of *differentiation* in this chapter, allowing the integrating dance to manifest more prominently in following parts. It is a way to first make visible some qualitative differences between embodiment and ‘disembodiment’, which in turn helps highlight how ‘disembodied’ dynamics might transform. In this context: why do I create seeming ‘opposites’ this way? Why do I put embodied and ‘disembodied’ against each other? Does it not contradict the core of my argument of embodiment as *wholeness*? I do in this matter ask for patience. The embodied wholeness that I engage has, as mentioned, also its *paradoxical* edge. The play of the



opposites therefore gains an apparent central stage in this chapter yet the whole is of course always there. I thus explore one of the *yin-yang* dynamics especially, engaging the productive tensions between seeming polarities that through their interplay unfold a creative dance. I do however not forget that it is not the only process of the whole. I therefore (re)emphasize how I do not consider that humans, on ontological levels, can be disembodied. Rather, I understand ‘disembodiment’ to manifest as an experiential possibility that humans, as embodied wholes, are capable of. ‘Disembodied’ and embodied, hence, are not as separate as they might at times appear to be engaged within my following discussion.

I consequently start off from a so-named ‘Cartesian understanding’ of oneself and the world in this chapter. Or, as Hatfield reminds, I commence from key influences that *interpretations* of Descartes mind-body philosophies has had and is having upon multiple dynamics of being alive. As Hatfield rightly asks: “who is the Descartes being praised or blamed? Is it the Descartes we’ve met through study of his writings, or a Descartes whose image has been more recently constructed (Hatfield 2014: 324)?” Although I confirm the importance of engaging directly with Descartes’ writings - which I also do - it is the latter Descartes that I primarily engage. This choice is explicitly guided by my research focus.

Since I am interested to explore how humans understand, make meaning, experience, and relate with the multiple dynamics of their lives, it is the meanings and influences that emerge out of Descartes’ philosophies that are alive and influential in the here and now that I explore. I work in this sense from the perspective that it is a Cartesian-inspired heritage that cannot be dismissed as an irrelevant relic from the past even if many of these ideas have been de-constructed, disproven, and criticized. Rather, it is a heritage that still moves as an influential onto-epistemological presence that impacts several ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating. Midgley affirms: “despite the efforts of many reformers, Descartes still rules. Mind and body are still held apart (Midgley 2001: 29).” I can in this sense deeply

feel how these words of Midgley ring true. ‘Mind’ and ‘body’ are, despite the efforts, often related with as two distinct entities. It is therefore this rather stubborn Cartesian-inspired heritage - rather than an in-depth engagement of Descartes’ writings and thinking - that I explore. Descartes is of course not the only important philosopher to be aware of in this context, yet his philosophies serve as a vital manifestation for how multiple ‘disembodied’ dynamics keep shaping and informing an embodied fabric of life. In addition, Descartes is the most relevant philosopher to work with in relation to the mind-body split that I engage. It would in this respect be out of the scope of the inquiry to engage the multilayered history of philosophy involved<sup>29</sup>. I therefore center my discussion *neither* around a historical Descartes *nor* around other relevant philosophers but start off from a Cartesian-inspired mind-body heritage as means to venture into further explorations. The main goal is thus to examine what a ‘disembodied’ onto-epistemological heritage does do to the human dance. Which ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating do ‘disembodied’ dynamics unfold? How do these dynamics influence and shape an embodied peace web?

### **2.1 A Note on My Process of Knowing**

To conduct this exploration, I vitally draw upon a holistic process of knowing. It is a key methodological choice that is present throughout the research, yet which I re-emphasize related to this chapter specifically. US American educator Parker J. Palmer contends in this regard how one way to start transforming ‘disembodied’ dynamics (Palmer talks about processes that unfold fragmentation and disconnection) is to engage a two-directional process of exploration. Instead of only investigating what ‘disembodiment’ might be leading towards and how it currently affects manners of being, becoming, knowing, and relating, one also needs to understand where ‘disembodiment’ might originate from (Palmer 1993: 6). One can

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<sup>29</sup> See for example Dietrich 2012, Lakoff and Johnson 1999, as well as Midgley 2001 for a deeper engagement with this point.

with this recognize how ‘disembodiment’ is ultimately not disembodied, but a dynamic process of *embodied* meaning-making that can change and transform in embodied ways.

To manifest this two-directional endeavor of exploration, one needs to engage a wider specter of epistemological engagement than what rationality can offer alone (Palmer 1993, Koppensteiner 2020). One needs in other words to move beyond merely *thinking* about embodiment to involve embodiment *in embodied ways*. In this sense, I build upon Escobar to argue how “we cannot re-construct the world and create genuinely new worlds using the same categories by which we are destroying it (Escobar 2020: 6)!” Rather, we need to widen our engagements of what is possible/real by “making the unthinkable thinkable, and the thinkable believable and possible (Escobar 2020: 6).” I contend in a similar vein how it is hard to transform ‘disembodiment’ within the limitations of ‘disembodiment’ itself, requiring instead an epistemological widening that makes embodied ways possible.

Palmer highlights how many current cultural dynamics and the societal institutions that they include tend to be structured upon ‘dominating metaphors of reality’ (Palmer 1993: xiv). He emphasizes with this a similar argument as previously engaged related to Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999, Johnson 2007), which concerns how humans tend to understand and experience themselves and the world through (un)conscious top-down metaphorical imagery that is co-shaped by bottom-up experience. Palmer adds how even though several metaphors applied by sciences have with time transformed and no longer advocate a Cartesian-inspired separation between ‘immaterial mind’ and ‘material body’, the idea still influences how many individuals and collectives understand and experience themselves and the world. This point greatly awakens my research curiosity. What allows a mind-body separation to keep dominating top-down metaphorical meaning-making even when the ‘gold’ standard highlighted by current top-down meaning-making - science - by now tend to reach different conclusions altogether? In my understanding, it has amongst others to do with how the

knowledge and experiences of the embodied whole are often neglected and excluded from these current meaning-making processes (even if they talk and think about the whole), ending up questioning ‘disembodiment’ within the limitations of ‘disembodiment’.

I engage in this context a widened process of knowing in this chapter. I emphasize particularly an epistemological engagement with *compassion* and *empathy*, which are two embodied-relational processes that I consider crucial in terms of unfolding transformative dynamics of encounter, interconnectedness, emotionality, and feeling. As Koppensteiner highlights related to empathy yet equally valid for compassion, empathy and compassion implies “being open to a deep relational encounter (Koppensteiner 2020: 104).” He furthermore asserts how the two, although related, differ: “whereas empathy relates to all types of experiences, compassion only relates to suffering (Koppensteiner 2020: 228).”

I similarly engage *compassion* to openly stay present with the dynamics of suffering that I encounter, understanding suffering to be deeply involved in many ‘disembodiment’ ways. At the same time, I engage *empathy* to ‘be with’ (Koppensteiner 2020: 227) the interconnected experiences of joy, relatedness, and peaces that arise. In this manner, I aim to unfold a deeper and more transformative understanding of the ‘disembodied’ tendency to ‘think oneself apart’, engaging what might make this tendency unfold as well as what might perpetuate its presence. Which purposes do ‘disembodied’ dynamics serve in embodied lives? My perspective is that all dynamics do, in one way or another, serve a purpose. Humans would not engage them if not. These purposes might be outdated, harmful, and painfully out of resonance with the embodied reality that one is, yet they arise from a place where they are believed and thought to be useful and life-serving. I do therefore *not* seek to explore how ‘disembodied’ dynamics are ‘wrong’, ‘bad’, or ‘unhuman’ in this chapter but aim to compassionately and empathically understand how they emerge out of an embodied fabric that is interwoven with peaces and conflicts alike. Instead of ‘getting rid of

disembodiment’, thus, I engage the embodied processes that it involves. I see in this context deep potentials for transformation emerging out of this space where ‘disembodied’ dynamics and embodied wholeness can be compassionately and empathically co-involved.

## **2.2 A Short Discussion of Descartes’ Mind-Body Philosophies**

I begin with this by taking a closer look at Descartes’ mind-body philosophies, engaging, as stated, those interpretations and aspects that are relevant for the research rather than a fully nuanced and in-depth discussion. I do this because I intend, as engaged, to explore the lived onto-epistemological heritage that has emerged/is emerging out of these Cartesian philosophies rather than the historical Descartes per se. In this respect, Descartes has been credited with proposing a radical separation between ‘mind’ and ‘body’, understanding them to evolve as two ‘distinct things’ (Descartes 2017ab). ‘Body’ is “an extended and unthinking thing (...) (Descartes 2017b: 54)” while ‘mind’ is “a thinking and unextended thing (...) (Descartes 2017b: 54).” ‘Mind’, thus, has been understood as *immaterial*, *indefinite*, and *indivisible*; ‘body’ as *material*, *definite*, and *divisible* (Descartes 2017b). Although Descartes confirms how ‘mind’ is closely joined with and connected to ‘body’, he seems with this to negate them as an embodied whole. The reason for it, and key for the inquiry, is that he often puts ‘mind’ - the conscious, rational process of thinking - as the (sole) center of what it means to be a human dance. It therefore becomes ‘mind’ that is the ‘I’, the ‘self that exists’, and ‘body’ merely a property/vehicle for this ‘thinking I’ to live in a material world. Descartes confirms: “I rightly conclude that my essence consists only in my being a thinking thing (...) although I certainly do possess a body with which I am very closely conjoined (...) (Descartes 2017b: 54).

Descartes sets with this the stage for a ‘philosophical problem’, although present before him, to fortify and grow. It is the ‘problem of embodiment’, which relates to how ‘an

immaterial mind/soul<sup>30</sup> can be connected with ‘a material body’ (Smith 2017, Skirry n.a). From an embodied perspective of wholeness, this question is rather meaningless, as embodied curiosity asks how the living, breathing whole emerges and transforms instead of how two ontologically separate ‘things’ connect. This is also the point that Sheets-Johnstone underlines when she, as mentioned, questions the word ‘embodiment’. She argues how “in using the term, we are actually perpetuating a divide that has not healed and will never heal so long as the terms remain part of our thinking (Sheets-Johnstone 1999: 311).” Although I agree with the core of her argument, I recognize, as stated, how this mind-body split is still ‘part of our thinking’. I therefore seek to understand what might make this (un)consciously thought gulf between ‘mind’ and ‘body’ persist, even if it means to (still) engage phrases such as ‘disembodied’ dynamics and embodied wholeness within my inquiry.

To continue the discussion of Descartes’ mind-body philosophies and their lived, embodied interpretations, hence, I highlight how Descartes from the famous point ‘I think, therefore I am’, which he has been credited with understanding as a point so certain that it can sustain all further knowledge built upon it (Descartes 2017ab, Hatfield 2014: 105-106), tends to confirm a hierarchy as regards which process of being human produces the most ‘reliable knowledge of the world’. Not surprisingly, it is ‘the mind’ that knows best by turning inwards and toward ‘the idea of a thing’. Through this inward turning, ‘the true essence’ of this ‘thing’ can be revealed by ‘the mind’s vivid and clear perception of it’ - a vivid clarity that seems to be guaranteed by the existence of an immaterial God (alone) (Hatfield 2014, Descartes 2017ab). This makes ‘mind’, in the process of knowing, largely independent *both* from ‘body’ *and* from the material-relational world. As such, a ‘thinking human self’ who experiences him(!)self as independent both from his surroundings and from his personal manifestations of wholeness tends to evolve. Holistic, embodied, and relational

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<sup>30</sup> Descartes uses the terms ‘soul’ and ‘mind’ rather interchangeably in his writings. Since ‘mind’ is the term that most prominently associates with an imbalanced rational dominance that I explore, I tend to stay with this term mainly throughout my discussion.

knowledge becomes with this less reliable, less true, less important, while ‘true knowing’ is seen as a rational-only endeavor. It does with this, as touched upon, tend to unfold an (un)conscious understanding of oneself and the world as being made up of distinct and hierarchical ‘parts’, as well as an (un)conscious understanding of oneself and others as being individuals only rather than interconnected endeavors of relationality.

According to Skirry, there was most likely both a religious and a scientific motivation behind this seemingly ‘separatist’ conclusion reached by Descartes (Skirry n.a: ‘2. Why a Real Distinction?’). The distinction between ‘mind’ and ‘body’ could, first, provide hope for an immortal ‘soul/mind’ to live on after the physical body, as empirically observed, dies. Second, the separation of ‘mind’ and ‘body’ could help pave the way for a mechanistic approach to physics that opposed the dominant Aristotelian ideas of the time regarding how all matter behave and organize itself out of an innate tendency/form that seeks to fulfill its ‘essence’. A swallow, for example, behaves as a swallow because of its intrinsic imperative to fulfill its ‘swallowness’ (Hatfield 2014: 291-321)<sup>31</sup>. With a radical separation between ‘mind’ and ‘body’, however, Descartes could expand this process of knowing to include mechanistic explanations fundamentally different from these Aristotelian ideas.

Descartes has with this, vitally, helped lay a foundation for many modern scientific discoveries to emerge (Hatfield 2014: 324-342). I do not negate these Cartesian contributions, yet I also ask the balancing question: what has been lost and neglected along the way? A highly imbalanced emphasis on rational and abstract knowledge can only lead to dynamics that are also harmful. As confirmed, peaces are a process of homeostatic balances rather than the one always over the other (Echavarría Alvarez and Koppensteiner in Echavarría Alvarez et al. 2018). I argue in this respect how this ‘disembodied’ imbalance that I explore has amongst others helped unfold an (un)conscious system of knowing where

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<sup>31</sup> I emphasize how this is a very limited and simplified engagement with Aristotelian (meta)physics. For more information, see Hatfield 2014.

embodied ways of being, becoming, and relating are often gravely neglected. This has in turn had huge consequences on human relationships both to themselves and to their human and more-than-human surroundings (Midgley 2001, Shepherd 2017, Palmer 2004, Abram 1996). I move because of this towards these so-called ‘lost and neglected’ aspects in the following, exploring some core ‘disembodied’ dominances as well as how these dominances move together with the absences that they attempt to neglect. In this manner, I keep returning to the paradox of how ‘disembodied’ dynamics ultimately emerge out of a deeply embodied web.

### **2.3 Disconnected ‘Parts’ (and Interconnected Processes of Wholeness)**

According to Midgley, an (un)conscious idea of atomism - influenced amongst others but not solely by Cartesian philosophies<sup>32</sup> - has come to prevail within many current ways of understanding. Atomism is the idea that the only way to know something is to break it into its smallest possible ‘parts’ and from this starting point attempt to make out how these ‘parts’, much like a machine, also ‘fit together’ (Midgley 2001: 2). It therefore leaves little room for embodied wholeness, as it is only the ‘static segments’ of a whole, which can assumingly be ‘thought into parts’, that are validated and focused upon. It is with this only from these ‘parts’ alone that one can investigate how they might relate. Relations, hence, exist between individual entities and not as an interconnected process of wholeness. Midgley therefore emphasizes how atomism also includes the idea of ‘social atomism’, which is “the idea that only individuals are real while the groupings in which they live are not (Midgley 2001: 3).” This leads to the notion that each person is “a distinct, ultimately independent unit, linked to the others around it only externally (Midgley 2001: 3).” Moreover, such an atomistic understanding is often coupled with an inclination towards creating hierarchies and judging different ‘sides’ into ‘good or bad’, ‘right or wrong’. Seemingly incompatible dichotomies hence develop whereby individuals and collectives are forced to choose between ‘opposite

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<sup>32</sup> Midgley also mentions many other philosophical influences, ranging from Greek atomists to 20<sup>th</sup> century ‘Western’ thinkers.



parts' of who they and others are. One becomes in this manner *either* reasonable *or* emotional, *either* masculine *or* feminine, *either* 'mind' *or* 'body'. This leads, according to Midgley, to a variety of intra (and inter) personal conflicts, as one constantly has to choose one 'side' of the wholeness that *is* (Midgley 2001: xi, 14-16). Vitaly however, atomism is only one idea, "one possible imaginative structure among other available ones (Midgley 2001: x)," yet it has come to prevail within many current meaning-making processes.

In a similar vein, Lakoff and Johnson contend how a (un)conscious atomistic heritage is present within many current metaphorical dynamics of meaning-making<sup>33</sup>. They explore, amongst others, the metaphorical structure 'Society of Mind', which together with other metaphors make up what they call the 'folk theory of faculty psychology' (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 409-414). The 'inside' of a person is in this context (un)consciously imagined as a society that is made up of different 'parts'/faculties, which all have their distinct personalities and are responsible for different activities of a human 'I'. Some of these 'parts'/faculties are reliable and predictable - like Reason and Understanding - while others are undisciplined and unpredictable - like Feeling. "Feeling and Reason commonly struggle for control over Will [the 'part'/faculty that can move the body to action]. If Feeling wins, it is unfortunate, because Reason alone knows what is best for the society as a whole (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 412)." Furthermore, and as in many societies, the 'Society of Mind' is hierarchically structured, with the rational and methodological Reason 'naturally' assuming the leading position.

Reason has good judgment, is cool, controlled, wise, and utterly reliable (...). He<sup>34</sup> acts as lawgiver, judge, and administrator. Reason decides what kind of things are to be done and sets down the rules for doing them. He judges whether the others

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<sup>33</sup> Lakoff and Johnson have mainly, yet not exclusively, researched metaphorical structures in English and in so-called 'Western' contexts. This does not render their theories invalid for other contexts yet requires a critical lens of culture and language to be applied. For an interesting discussion on how conceptual metaphors are simultaneously shaped by local/specific contexts *and* a more collectively shared experience, see Kövecses 2005.

<sup>34</sup> I highlight how I allow the pronoun 'he' to remain with purpose above. A high imbalance of rationality is, I underline, deeply interconnected with a tendency to value the masculine over the feminine. I can moreover imagine how Lakoff and Johnson might have considered something similar when they chose the pronoun 'he'.

[‘parts’/faculties] are carrying out those rules properly. He also assembles and analyzes the information made available to him (...) and carefully calculates on the basis of this information what needs to be done (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 411-412).

What these separating and atomistic tendencies do to the human dance is in this sense, I propose, that they (un)consciously conceptualize our interconnected, embodied existences into individual-only ‘entities’ that are made up of clear, distinct, and hierarchical ‘inner parts’ and that, furthermore, consist of a fixed and non-changing ‘inner essence’; a ‘stable core’ that never becomes different. The ‘human entity’ is therefore contained - or even constrained(!) - within a fixed and solid ‘body-boundary’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 31-34, Shepherd 2017: 12), which prevents it from dynamically interacting with and as the surroundings. Nevertheless, from an embodied perspective of wholeness, this ‘body boundary’ can, as mentioned, be better understood as a *contact boundary* (Perls 1973). It is a dynamic process of encounter that continuously allows one to transform, change, and manifest anew. US American ecologist and philosopher David Abram confirms:

these mortal [bodily] limits in no way close me off from the things around (...). On the contrary, my finite bodily presence alone is what enables me to freely engage the things around (...) to insinuate myself in other lives. Far from restricting my access to things and to the world, the body is my very means of entering into relations with all things (Abram 1996: 38).

In neuroscience, there are in this regard several important insights that support such a dynamic and relational understanding of what it means to be alive. They emphasize how an embodied sense of self can only develop through and in experiences of relation, and how an embodied sense of relationality can only emerge through and in lived experiences of self (see Bråten 2007, Damasio 1994, 2018, Doidge 2007, Fogel 2009, Lewis et al. 2000, Porges 2011). Consequently, it is through familiarizing oneself with one’s embodied wholeness that one can familiarize oneself with the embodied wholeness around - as well as vice versa. For example, mirror neurons are neurons that are found to fire in the same way when someone engages themselves in action/movement *and* when they observe the same action/movement

being engaged by another (Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia 2008, Gallese 2003). Mirror neurons do however not seem to fire when someone witnesses an action/movement that appear ‘non-intentional’ and ‘random’ but require the witnessing person to ascribe an intentionality to what is being performed (Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia 2008). Mirror neurons, thus, relate to our embodied capacities to sense not only ourselves but also each other as meaning-unfolding creatures, helping us “understand [each other] as intentional agents (Gallese 2003: 171).” They therefore emerge as vital for key embodied-relational processes, including empathy and compassion (see also Beausoleil and LeBaron 2013, París Albert and Comins Mingol 2013). Italian professor of psychobiology Vittorio Gallese asserts in this context how the intersubjective field of mirror neurons does importantly not manifest through a purely cognitive endeavor but through a ‘shared manifold’ that involves “a multiplicity of states that include actions, sensations and emotions (Gallese 2003: 171).” In other words, humans do not only ‘think’ themselves empathic and interconnected but *experience* themselves as empathic and interconnected through participating in a shared field of embodied existence.

US American Buddhist author and psychotherapist Mark Epstein underlines in this respect how a notion of ‘self’ is approached radically differently within Buddhist perspectives. A key disparity lies in the metaphorical orientation applied, with ‘Western’ understandings often seeing ‘the self’ through a metaphor of *spatiality*. One is metaphorically assumed as a place: as “an entity with boundaries, layers, and a core (...) (Epstein 1995: 138).” In Buddhist perspectives, a sense of self is approached through a metaphor of *temporality*. The focus lies not on what a stable ‘essence’ might be but on how everything and everyone are and become a constant process of change. This leads to the realization that there is no stable self at all but a continuous process of transformation. The process of thinking exists without there being any thinker behind it (Epstein 1995)<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Epstein names his book *Thoughts without a Thinker* (Epstein 1995).

Self, it turns out, is a metaphor for a process that we do not understand, a metaphor for that which knows. The [Buddhist] insight practices reveal that such a metaphor is unnecessary, even disruptive. It is enough (...) to open to the ongoing process of knowing without imputing someone behind it (...) (Epstein 1995: 154-155).

This fundamental ‘lack of self’ and the emptiness that unfolds thereof is in this sense understood affirmatively in Buddhist philosophies. It is through the lack of a stable self and the ability to be without ultimate certainty that one can function both “effectively *and* spontaneously in the world (Epstein 1995: 72. Emphasis in original). In a similar vein, Koppensteiner describes the affirmative potentials embedded in the empty space of ‘chaos’, which is one of the rhythms that make up the before mentioned 5Rhythms practice. “She [Gabrielle Roth, the founder of 5Rhythms] recognizes this emptiness as a positive space loaded with potential, a space in which transformation and integration can take place (Koppensteiner 2020: 108).” Nevertheless, for someone, such as myself, who has grown up with metaphorical frames that tend to highlight (only) a stable essence of what it means to be alive - rather than, as Carl Rogers (1961) puts it, our ‘integrated changingness’ - it can be hard to embrace the seemingly ‘opposite’ idea that there is no other stability than the lack thereof. According to Epstein, it can lead to sensations of ‘terror’ when one realizes “just how precarious the sense of self actually is (...) (Epstein 1995: 132),” potentially “pulling the rug out from under us, (...) shaking the foundation on which we have constructed our accepted vision of ourselves (Epstein 1995: 132-133).” I am therefore curious to explore what might help others and myself let go of a fixed idea of ‘self’ in this manner, (re)embracing our existence as an interconnected dance of ongoing transformation. It does not mean to abandon all ideas of self in all contexts, but to evolve ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating that can affirm rather than deny this vibrant life dance. In this context, I engage the process that associates with the ‘mental and reasonable essence’ that singles out ‘parts’ in this way and that tends to single itself out as the ‘most reasonable part of the lot’. Since a so-called

‘Cartesian understanding’ of oneself and the world tend to refer to this process as ‘mind’, I take a closer look at this notion myself.

### 2.3.1 Processes of ‘Mind’<sup>36</sup>

‘Mind’ is in the Cambridge online dictionary defined as “the part of a person that makes it possible for him or her to think, feel emotions, and understand things (Cambridge Dictionary 2020b).” At a first glance, this definition does not offer much clarity, as it can, through the metaphor ‘being a part’, render ‘mind’ a stable ‘thing’ that produces thought. It can hence fortify the idea of ‘mind’ as a ‘stable core and essence’ of an ‘individual self’. Koppensteiner problematizes this aspect related to how notions such as ‘mind’ are often conceived as stable entities in languages that heavily rely on nouns (Koppensteiner 2020: 108). It includes English and my mother tongue Norwegian. He proposes in this context to relate with ‘mind’ as “an ongoing process of transforming information in intricate interrelation with other embodied and felt processes (Koppensteiner 2020: 108),” moving away from a static and essentialist understanding of ‘mind’. In a similar vein, I understand ‘mind’ as a dynamic and interconnected process. I therefore, as engaged, follow amongst others Open Floor International in that “we separate them [the manifold processes involved in embodied wholeness] only to understand their particular essences; together they compromise an inseparable weave of our humanness (Open Floor International 2017: 14).” I hence single out ‘mind’ in my following discussion to deeper understand the differentiated dynamics that this process involves, yet I ultimately rely upon an embodied ground of wholeness. With it, I use the Cambridge definition above as a pointer towards rather than a solid description of the differentiated dynamics involved in ‘mind’. It includes processes of *thinking*, *understanding* (making sense), and *feeling* (being aware of emotions).

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<sup>36</sup> My discussion in this part provides only a brief and limited engagement with a multifaceted field of research that is involved in complex notions such as ‘mind’, as well as the later ‘emotionality’. It is in this regard my intention to highlight only the core aspects that are particularly relevant related to this research.

Damasio discusses ‘mind’ as the emergence of abilities in organisms who have developed complex nervous systems, including humans, to create neurological maps - images - ‘within’ the organism. “The basic unit for minds is the image, the image of a thing or what a thing does, or what the thing cause you to feel; or the image of what you think of the thing; or the images of the words that translate any and all of the above (Damasio 2018: 91).” Moreover, “those images as they flow in time are the constituents of minds (Damasio 2018: 75).” Processes of ‘mind’, hence, help unfold ‘inner’ interpretations of one’s experience, emerging as a seeming ‘private, inner world’ of images that tends to be experienced as accessible only to oneself. The core purpose of this image-creating process is to evolve a meaningful enough integration of the flow of experience to render the complexity of this flow relatable enough for the functioning of everyday life (see also Siegel 2011). I recall in this sense back the before discussed dynamics of conceptual metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999). Metaphors are highly image-engaging processes. According to Oelrich, metaphors help convey complex meanings, such as paradoxes and inconsistencies, precisely by turning “an experience, a feeling or a mood, *into an image* (Oelrich 214: 139. Emphasis added). They thus help one relate with ‘ungraspable’ abstractions and ideas through creating a more ‘concrete’ world of images where relatable meanings can unfold.

I emphasize in this context how this image-creating process of ‘mind’ is importantly not only a ‘mental’ process but an interconnected endeavor that involves multiple and co-unfolding dynamics (see Damasio 1994, 2018, Sheets-Johnstone 1999, Fogel 2009, Lakoff and Johnson 1999, Johnson 2007, Siegel 2011). It includes bottom-up sensate experience as well as a lived field of embodied emotionality. Fogel argues in this respect how emotionality has developed to help neural beings, including humans, navigate a complex terrain of ‘inner-outer’ sensations by adding a felt tonality “of whether something is good or bad (Fogel 2009: 56).” ‘Feeling’ is the ‘mental’ image-creating dynamic of this process, helping embodied

wholes unfold ‘inner’ images to make sense of the emotionality that they are experiencing (Damasio 2018: 126). Processes of ‘mind’ therefore continuously co-emerge with (un)conscious emotional evaluations regarding whether internal-external events are considered conducive or not conducive to homeostatic health<sup>37</sup> (Damasio 2018: 99-100). Processes of ‘mind’ are hence not value free but driven by constant homeostatic pulls towards new dynamic equilibriums. As such, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are not absolute and abstract categories, but lived engagements with homeostatic survival, wellbeing, and health. As humans are fundamentally relational, this perspective does not support a self-centered understanding of ethics but unfolds a relational engagement with what embodied ethics are and can become (see Rouhiainen 2008, Lehner 2021, Koppensteiner 2020).

Being aware of how interconnected processes of ‘mind’ can be engaged as affirmative embodied-relational processes rather than as a contribution to ‘disembodiment’ becomes in this manner essential. Even though ‘mental’ dynamics can become overly dominating and out of balance, they can be engaged in life-affirming ways. With this, processes of ‘mind’ can help co-manifest many possibilities for life-affirming engagement, including capacities for imagination, the use of symbols and language, learning, compassion and empathy, as well as more (Gilbert 2009: 34, 39). This is because ‘mind’ helps evolve abilities to relate with abstraction (to metaphorically take a step ‘back’), to ‘think’ along a timeline (to plan and relate to a past and a future), to see connections between phenomena that appear unconnected, to approach another’s situation rather than only one’s own (Siegel 2011, Fogel 2009). ‘Mind’, therefore, is involved in countless movements of joy, creativity, and peaces. It is also the reason why I refuse to see embodiment as the mere ‘swinging to the other side’ in this research. I do *not* consider embodiment as a devaluation of ‘mind’ but as a rebalancing inclusion of wholeness. Nonetheless, I recognize how processes of ‘mind’ can be engaged in

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<sup>37</sup> See also my discussion of the ‘homeostatic imperative’ in chapter 2.3.3.

ways that attempt to hide or deny this fundamental multiplicity and interconnectedness involved. To explore some of the dynamics that might make this happen, I engage the neuroscientific insights involved in plastic paradoxes.

### 2.3.2 Plastic Paradoxes

Doidge (2007) argues how human brains are fundamentally plastic. It implies that neural connections continuously change throughout the lifespan of an individual as new neural pathways create and old ones fade. This simultaneous process of creating and fading happens because the multiple ‘inner-outer’ experiences that a person engages activate neural signals that causes neurons that ‘fire together’ (activate together) to ‘wire together’. This co-activation forms in turn more stable and dominant connections when this process is nourished, repeated, and strengthened. Consequently, those neurons that are *not* activated together follow the opposite pattern: ‘what fires apart, wires apart’ (Doidge 2007: 63-64)<sup>38</sup>. In its essence, thus, neuroplasticity helps explain how both learning and unlearning happen in the brain. Neural connections that are strengthened become gradually easier to access as compared to non-strengthened ones; neural connections that are not strengthened become gradually less easier to access. Humans therefore carry a potential to keep transforming and learning throughout the course of their lives. Yet, this creative world of new possibilities also comes with a ‘shadow’; the *plastic paradox* (Doidge 2007: xvi).

The plastic paradox emphasizes how humans are, due to being neurologically immensely open for change, also profoundly geared towards creating entrenched patterns that stubbornly resist any change at all (Doidge 2007: 208-210). To help explain, Doidge borrows a metaphor originally put forth by Spanish neuroscientist Alvaro Pascual-Leone (in Doidge 2007: 209-210). The process of neuroplasticity can in this context be understood through imagining the plastic brain as a hill covered in snow. The features of the hill - its rocks,

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<sup>38</sup> For a more detailed account on neuroplasticity, see Doidge 2007.



angles, and qualities of snow - are the given, genetic aspects of being human. When someone decides to sled down this 'brain hill' for the first time - engage themselves in the world - the path they end up taking - the neural connections that they create - is determined both by given genetics and by conscious and unconscious decisions as regards how and where to steer. The second time that the person sleds down the hill, however, there is already the contours of a path present. With time and repetition, this path - and perhaps other connected ones - become more prominent than others. It hence becomes increasingly difficult to *not* (un)consciously keep choosing this path as one continues sledding.

The *second time* you take the slope down (...) you will more likely than not find yourself somewhere or another that is related to the path you took the first time. It won't be exactly that path, but it will be closer to that one than any other. And if you spend your entire afternoon sledding down, walking up, sledding down, at the end you will have some paths that have been used a lot, some that have been used very little... and there will be tracks that you have created, and it is very difficult now to get out of those tracks. And those tracks are not genetically determined anymore (Pascual-Leone quoted in Doidge 2007: 209. Emphasis in original).

A similar, although less metaphorical, process happens in the plastic brain. Those experiences that are strengthened form with time neural connections that are 'stronger' and thus easier to access. Ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating can with this turn habitual, as some neural paths become easier and easier to access as compared to (all) other possible ways. It is hence a self-strengthening dynamic that can make it increasingly difficult to also transform (Doidge 2007: 209). A basic awareness of this process can in this sense help underline how a 'mental' focus on only 'parts' and 'disembodied' thinking can, through an increased strengthening of the neural connections that support this way of understanding, help deepen and maintain its own persistence. Borrowing from Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 10-13), it can 'highlight' what is assumingly 'the only possible way'. Crucially however, this process of neuroplasticity is ultimately neither 'good' nor 'bad' but 'simply' a dynamic that helps humans integrate new learning (Doidge 2007, Siegel 2011). It can nonetheless unfold both helpful and harmful dynamics, which makes Beausoleil and LeBaron argue how it

“offers hope for the field of conflict transformation if we identify how to access and engage entrenched patterns of thought and behavior. The very plasticity that enabled the formation of such patterns offers the possibility for future change (Beausoleil and LeBaron 2013: 136).”

By finding ways to form new neural connections that gradually grow more prominent, thus, dynamics of meaning making can transform. It might be something like this that Dietrich has in mind when he argues how a “central question for transrational peace research [is] (...): how can destructive, violent narratives be retold in a new manner so that the relations, places in the world, and their own history heal? (Dietrich 2012: 264, see also Mehl-Madrona 2005).” It is importantly with such an intention that I explore ‘disembodied’ dynamics in this research. I do, as touched upon, not intend to ‘get rid of’ narratives, conceptual metaphors, and top-down meaning-making - how could I? - but seek to understand how these processes can be engaged in manners that affirm rather than harm embodied life. I thus seek to understand “where metaphor is useful to thought, where it is crucial to thought, and where it is misleading (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 73).” This is however not a linear process for which there exists a step-by-step guide, but an imperfect journey that includes multifaceted webs. In this context, neuroplastic insights provide *one* helpful perspective as regards how these embodied transformations can evolve.

Humans seem with this, notably, to be highly changeable and deeply change resistant. Both sides of this paradoxical truth moreover co-unfold life-affirming as well as life-denying dynamics. The art of embodied living hence emerges as an ever-transforming endeavor that includes multiple both-ands. Nevertheless, within Cartesian-inspired understandings, this lived and imperfect reality is, as stated, often neglected at the expense of static ‘parts’. I therefore wonder: what does such a ‘disembodied’ engagement do to our individual and collective abilities to manifest peaces? In my understanding, it emerges a different idea of peace altogether, unfolding in line with what Dietrich calls a modern idea of peace. In this

context, focuses are mainly/only upon security, institutions, development, and (eternal) economic growth (Dietrich 2012: 116-160), which Ney and Humber (in LeBaron et al. 2013: 15-29) argue has also had huge influences on what is accepted and not accepted as valid and effective approaches within the peace and conflict field (see also Cremin et al. 2018, Lederach 1995, 2005, Richmond 2006, Beausoleil and LeBaron 2013, Koppensteiner 2020). A key difference lies in this sense how the interplay between dualities is engaged. Rather than unfolding multiple both-and, a modern idea of peace creates a linear and static either-or (Dietrich 2012). This arises, in my understanding, a serious concern regarding who or what has the power to define what is the 'right/good' side of this either-or as well as a question regarding what happens when this defining power evolves out of a 'disembodied' process that does not take lived dynamics into account. I am therefore interested to explore what these so-called 'peaces of disembodiment' might imply, especially as regards what might also make these 'peaces' appear as life-affirming in certain contexts, even when they - or perhaps because(?) - neglect several dynamics involved in embodied wholeness.

### **2.3.3 'Peaces of Disembodiment', and Dynamics of 'Pleasure' and 'Pain'**

Pearce (2020) discusses how violence - one of the most painful and seemingly incomprehensible experiences of being alive - is often related with from a so-called 'disembodied' perspective. It happens because violence ruptures 'normal' realms of meaning-making, being too painful and life-threatening to find its space within usual meaning-making frames. It makes with this candidly visible how humans are vulnerable, shedding light onto dynamics of mortality and emphasizing how one has, in the final instance, little to no control over multiple dynamics that impact one's life (Pearce 2020: 75). Koppensteiner affirms: "vulnerability arises from the recognition that human beings in the final instance do not have control over their lives (Koppensteiner 2020: 226). According to Pearce, many individuals and collectives attempt with this to 'deny' the presence of violence, trying to 'think

themselves apart' from the embodied reality that violence involves. Since they are embodied beings who cannot escape their embodied reality, however, individuals and collectives are rarely successful in doing so. Tensions between wishes to 'think' pain, violence, and vulnerability away and the underlying wisdom that this cannot be done thereby create, and one often ends up developing "avoidance strategies of all kinds. We mentally flee the fear and pain of violence and we refuse to acknowledge the extent to which our lives are affected by it. We are in denial at the same time as we are horrified (...)" (Pearce 2020: 70)." With it, we paradoxically allow violence "to dominate and penetrate our world (Pearce 2020: 74)."

Even though I am not researching violence in this inquiry, I find in this regard useful pointers in terms of what might be the so-called 'peaces of disembodiment' mentioned. They have in my understanding a lot to do with how dynamics of pain, suffering, violence, trauma, and more - along, of course, with other interconnected dynamics of wholeness - are felt in embodied manners. Consequently, by 'thinking these dynamics away' one can unfold an 'illusion of peaces' where embodied existence appears more controllable and less painful than it is (see also van der Kolk 2014, Fogel 2009, Brown 2012, 2017, Levine 2010)<sup>39</sup>. I do not hold much for such 'disembodied' escapism to be an ontological possibility for human wholes. Yet, I can compassionately recognize how there might be deep longings to feel less pain and vulnerability behind a tendency to 'think oneself apart'.

Damasio argues in this respect how all organisms, including humans, are amongst others driven by a deep, (un)conscious 'homeostatic imperative' (Damasio 2018: 239). It implies that one dynamically seeks to encounter what is experienced and believed to be

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<sup>39</sup> It is in this sense also interesting to observe how there exist several (un)conscious metaphorical dynamics that are related to an idea of control through using the imagery of machines. It includes 'mind as computer' (Lakoff and Johnson 1999), 'body as machine' (Shepherd 2011), and 'nature as machine' (Dietrich 2012, Midgley 2001). Shepherd and Midgley maintain in this respect how such a machine-oriented imagery can allow humans to feel and believe that they possess more 'control' over their lives than they do because machines are human-made and thus, for the main part, under human control (Midgley 2001: 33, Shepherd 2011: 77-78). As Shepherd contends therefore: humans "thoroughly understand the machine because we are its creators. We imagine it, design it and build it. We maintain it, fix it when it breaks and modify it to improve its performance. Our relationship to the machine is godlike (Shepherd 2011: 77)."

‘pleasure’ - dynamics of wellbeing, thriving, health, and more - as well as, to the best of one’s abilities, avoid ‘pain’ - suffering, sickness, death, and others - on the way. It moreover includes a motivation to ‘optimize’ (Damasio 2018: 45), which means that individuals and collectives continuously also project themselves into the future by engaging different and yet-to-be-known ways to be, become, know, and relate. This makes ongoing, creative adaption to ever-changing circumstances key. It furthermore, as engaged, unfolds transformation not as an added choice to embodied existence but as part and parcel of its homeostatic core (see Koppensteiner 2009, Tjersland 2019). Importantly nevertheless, this homeostatic engagement does not mean to engage a linear back and forth movement between either ‘pleasure’ or ‘pain’ but to dance a dynamic dance through and between diverse and co-creating processes of embodied wholeness (Fogel 2009, van der Kolk 2014, Badenoch 2014).

I (re)underline with this how the transrational peace understanding that I amongst others lean upon in this inquiry sees peaces as such an ongoing movement of ever-changing dynamic (dis)equilibriums. Peaces therefore need to acknowledge both the ‘pleasures’ and the ‘pains’ because balances cannot happen by denying imbalances, healing and wellbeing cannot unfold without also integrating suffering and pain. Slovakian cognitive biologist Ladislav Kováč (2012) emphasizes in this regard how there in many societies, especially those greatly influenced by capitalist economies, tend to exist a rather narrow (un)conscious drive to manifest only one side of this integrated ‘pain-pleasure’ dance. ‘Pleasure’ is sought to be fully maximized while ‘pain’ is attempted to be completely eradicated. These dynamics moreover tend to reinforce themselves, as individuals and collectives are within these societal frames often ‘rewarded’ for making choices that adhere to this (un)conscious goal of ‘achieving zero pain and maximizing pleasure’ (see also Ehrenreich 2009). From an embodied perspective of wholeness, this idea that no ‘pain’ and only ‘pleasure’ is possible or even the ‘best’ for the human dance is built upon a false dichotomy. It attempts in a

Cartesian-inspired manner to radically separate the ‘painful’ from the ‘pleasurable’. US American Buddhist vipassana meditation teacher Phillip Moffitt confirms:

our culture’s debasement of suffering represents a major loss (...). It denies the validity of many of the major emotional events in your life. It narrows your life such that you are constantly reacting to a set of questions: How do I get and keep what’s pleasant and avoid and get rid of that which is unpleasant? Am I winning or losing? Am I being praised or blamed? (Moffitt 2008: 32-33).

By constantly attempting to avoid one ‘side’ of life’s interrelated dance, one does not limit this ‘side’ alone but the whole, integrated flow of existence. With it, life gets ‘confined’ into only those dynamics that can provide one with a certain perception of ‘control’. According to Brown: “numbing vulnerability (...) doesn’t just deaden the pain of our difficult experiences; numbing vulnerability also dulls our experiences of love, joy, belonging, creativity, and empathy (Brown 2012: 137).” Humans therefore *need* to feel a certain presence of vulnerability in their lives because vulnerability is at “the core, the heart, the center, of meaningful (...) experiences (Brown 2012: 12).” Consequently - without romanticizing dynamics of suffering and pain and without stopping to care about the homeostatic movement away from ‘pain’ and towards ‘pleasure’ - I acknowledge how this movement, in the final instance, needs both edges to unfold its interconnected dance.

The challenging dynamics of ‘pain’ that I have discussed above do in this sense also serve life-affirming purposes in human lives. They function for example as an alarm system that helps inform the embodied whole about what is currently in a state of imbalance and thus guides them towards possibilities for homeostatic equilibriums anew (Fogel 2009: 161). According to Doidge, humans often need “a roadblock of some kind (...) to help (...) change direction (...) (Doidge 2007: 210).” Doidge thus emphasizes the transformative potentials embedded in *disequilibrium*s, mirroring Canadian theatre practitioner David Diamond in that it is often “in reaction to disequilibrium that novelty occurs (Diamond 2007: 172).” Furthermore, US American teacher of Zen Buddhism Joan Iten Sutherland highlights how

suffering and pain can be sources of compassion and relatedness. This is because “having known pain, it’s pretty hard to be indifferent to the sufferings of others (Sutherland in Friedman and Moon 1997: 8).” I add that having dared to recognize one’s capacities to inflict suffering and pain upon both others and oneself, it becomes hard to stay indifferent to how one moves and relates within the world. Pearce affirms: “our ability to inflict pain and experience pain reveals our vulnerability and mutual dependence (Pearce 2020: 75).”

US American vipassana teacher and clinical psychologist Jack Kornfield underlines in this regard how there is a qualitative difference involved between what he, from a Buddhist perspective, calls processes of suffering and pain. Suffering unfolds as the “reaction to the inevitable pain of life (Kornfield 2008: 242),” thus manifesting as the personal and collective reactions, responses, and relationships to the inevitable pain that life includes. Moffitt (2008) similarly argues how suffering and pain<sup>40</sup> arrive through two dissimilar processes. Pain emerges through unescapable dynamics such as death, grief, sickness, and more, which cannot be avoided and hence serve the embodied dance best when they can be acknowledged and integrated. Suffering, on the other hand, arises as an added ‘mental’ component to this pain when one either over-identifies with it or attempts to avoid it. A key step to unfolding less suffering is therefore to acknowledge how the first process of pain is inevitably present. From this, one can transform additional suffering by surrendering to life ‘as it is’ (Moffitt 2008: 42-43). This unconditional acceptance - what Brach (2003) calls radical acceptance - allows the dynamic flow of life to keep changing and unfolding because it creates room for processes such as suffering and pain to also become different. It includes to (re)unfold dynamics of peaces, healing, and joy. It confirms with this how “when you work directly with your capacity for being with pain, you are also working with your capacity for being with joy (Moffitt 2008: 42).” This affirmative dance, which Moffitt aptly names *Dancing*

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<sup>40</sup> Moffitt also often refers to pain and suffering as ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ suffering. In my discussion, I stay with the terms ‘pain’ and ‘suffering’ for purposes of clarity.

*with Life* (Moffitt 2008), requires in this sense a dynamic movement that needs to be continuously re-encountered and re-engaged. It therefore also involves to dynamically dance the many smaller and larger ‘ouches’ of one’s life (Mofitt 2008: 39-56). The only alternative would however be to wait for disequilibriums to grow so prominent and huge that they force a change of ways. In this respect, I underline how there are ways to facilitate such a dynamic art of embodied peaces, creating conditions where ongoing transformations can easier be lived. In the following, I explore a founding ground for how such a process can be helped.

#### **2.3.4 Felt Sensations of Safe Enough and Widening Windows of Tolerance**

Through his polyvagal theory, Porges (2011, 2017) argues how one of the first dynamics that humans (un)consciously ‘scan’ for when they enter a new situation is whether or not they feel safe enough. It happens almost fully outside of conscious awareness, emerging as a bodily felt sense of sufficient/not sufficient safety, which Porges calls ‘neuroception’ (Porges 2017: 68). If someone in this context (un)consciously ‘evaluates’ a situation as safe enough, the embodied whole tends to active what Porges calls ‘the social engagement system’. It is a part of the nervous system that allows one to become open and receptive, actively tuned into the surroundings and oneself. “When the social engagement system is working, it down-regulates defenses and we feel calm, we hug people, we look at them and we feel good (Porges 2017: 69).” If someone on the other hand ‘evaluates’ a situation as not safe enough, the embodied whole tends to activate the survival system. It is a part of the nervous system that makes one more ‘narrow’ - ‘minded’ and ‘bodied’ - as one focuses upon survival and might temporarily struggle to “engage others and (...) recruit the wonderful neural circuits that enable us to express the expansive, creative, and benevolent aspects of being human (Porges 2017: 86).” Even though both the social engagement system and the survival system are with this vital, they are hence context specific. It is exhausting and limiting to keep engaging the survival



system in situations where one is safe enough. Vice versa, it is dangerous to not engage this system in situations where one is in physical and/or emotional danger (Porges 2011, 2017).

Although Porges' theories involve a lot more details and intricacies than what I have highlighted above, and even though his theories have also been criticized related to some neuroscientific details<sup>41</sup>, I emphasize this part of his theories because it helps me bring attention to how crucial the feeling of safe/not safe enough is - which is also a perspective that is shared by several others authors (see Siegel 2011, van der Kolk 2014, Badenoch 2014, Fogel 2009, Levine 2010). According to Beausoleil and LeBaron, a basic awareness of this safe/not safe enough dynamic can for example help emphasize how embodied transformations can easier unfold because “when the body senses safety, the autonomic nervous system supports a state of open receptiveness. This state has been found essential to both learning and integrating new information, as well as preventing re-traumatization when engaging past experiences (Beausoleil and LeBaron 2013: 137).” When someone on the other hand “feels under stress, threat, or shame (...) it is more difficult to remain open to unfamiliar people or ideas or to create novel responses to conflict (Beausoleil and LeBaron 2013: 137).” It is thus, I propose, essential to find ways to manifest a dynamic balance between *both* creative possibilities for being ‘out of balance’ - affirmative potentials for disequilibriums - *and* a safe enough frame that makes this ‘out of balance’ available. Building on Porges (2011), it is vital to help manifest the transformative power of feeling *safe enough*.

It is in this sense crucial to, amongst others, cultivate a certain ‘tolerance for distress’ (Gilbert 2009: 226-228) as regards the diverse embodied experiences that life brings. It includes to involve *both* the before-discussed dynamics of ‘pain’ *and* the before-discussed dynamics of ‘pleasure’. Siegel argues in this respect how one can learn to stay present with a broader range of experience through widening what he calls the ‘window of tolerance’

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<sup>41</sup> See for example Grossman 2023.

(Siegel 2011: 137-139). It is a model/metaphor that helps describe how one can learn to maintain a certain quality of equilibrium - 'tolerance' - as regards diverse facets of life, emerging as a "band of arousal (...), within which an individual can function well (Siegel 2011: 137)." When someone falls either over or under this tolerance window, they tend to enter imbalanced and overwhelmed states whereby they are not able to fully function and stay present with what is emerging. It can be expressed as *hyperaroused* chaos or as *hypoaroused* depression/rigidity. Siegel therefore describes how "within our window of tolerance we remain receptive, outside of it we become reactive (Siegel 2011: 137)." Vitality however, everyone has "multiple windows of tolerance. And for each of us those windows are different, often specific to certain topics or certain emotional states (Siegel 2011: 137)." Everyone therefore has a certain 'tolerance' for different qualities, forms, and facets of experience, and one is consequently never the same from one situation to another.

With this, a key to unfolding more individual and collective potentials for wellbeing, health, transformation, and embodied peace is, I propose, to find individual and collective ways to widen diverse 'windows of tolerance' so that individuals and collectives can easier tap into a sufficiently felt sense of transformative safety related to a broader range of embodied life. They can in this manner expand their capacities for staying present with a wider multiplicity of life, which can in turn help them co-unfold more both-and processes, 'lack of control', and other important embodied dynamics. In my understanding, this is one, yet not the only, important process involved within an embodied peace dance.

#### **2.4 A Conclusion: Dancing Life's Wholeness**

I have in this sense, throughout this second chapter, empathically and compassionately explored how a 'disembodied' Cartesian-inspired onto-epistemological heritage can influence and shape how embodied-relational wholes understand, relate with, and experience themselves and their surroundings. I have moreover started to engage how these

‘disembodied’ processes can potentially also transform. I have in this context focused upon an atomistic tendency to split embodied wholes into static, hierarchical, and distinct ‘inner parts’, as well as the tendency to radically separate this ‘inner’ from the ‘outer’. What I have amongst others come to understand concerns in this respect how ‘disembodied’ dynamics are ultimately not disembodied, but lived processes of embodied meaning-making that are interconnected with dynamics of ‘pleasure’ and ‘pain’ alike. I hence also realize how I can tap into the same intertwined dynamics between top-down and bottom-up, as well as ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ processes that create ‘disembodied’ dynamics to begin with to empathically and compassionately emerge possibilities for embodied transformation and peaces anew.

The reason I emphasize *empathically and compassionately* above concerns how an acceptance of and engagement with dynamics such as vulnerability, pain, and suffering - along, of course, with interconnected processes of joy, wellbeing, and peaces - is crucial. Embodied peaces can in this context not unfold by neglecting one ‘side’ of life’s interconnected dance but needs to (re)engage life’s multiple both-ands. Vitally however, many of the so-called ‘challenging’ processes of life can be hard to live. It is therefore essential to find ways to (re)engage embodied wholeness in manners that are supportive and affirmative. I have in this respect, amongst others, explored life-affirming processes involved in ‘mind’, neuroscientific insights involved in plastic paradoxes, the dynamic and homeostatic dance through and between dynamics of both ‘pleasure’ and ‘pain’, the balancing need to, at times, also be out of balance, as well as felt sensations of safe enough and the possibilities to widen diverse ‘windows of tolerance’. My discussion has in this sense not yet been a full and in-depth investigation of all the dynamics involved, but a founding ground of insights that I can build my further discussion upon. In the main chapter 4, I return to many of these aspects discussed yet I also venture into multiple other dynamics. Before this main discussion, however, I dedicate a chapter to Open Floor specifically.

## Chapter 3: Open Floor

In this chapter, I explain, as mentioned, Open Floor in more depth. I do it through a multi-directional process of inquiry where I engage *descriptive*, *reflective*, and *critical* elements. I base in this sense the main part of my exploration upon a *descriptive* process, which aims to provide a descriptive overview of Open Floor. At the same time, I include a *reflective* process where I briefly reflect upon how I understand Open Floor in relation to embodied peaces, as well as a *critical* process that helps me unfold a starting understanding of sociocultural strengths and blind spots/limitations that Open Floor carries. In relation to the latter, I explore key sociocultural-historical influences that move behind Open Floor. Importantly however, I do not engage these different processes through a linear and separated endeavor but co-unfold them through and with each other. Furthermore, I (re)emphasize how it is, as stated, hard to come across literature when it comes to Open Floor. This is because Open Floor is a relatively young practice that has not yet been much researched upon. As engaged in the literature overview in chapter 1.4, I therefore mainly tap into more traditional sources when I discuss the sociocultural-historical influences that move behind Open Floor. When I describe the Open Floor curriculum and the Open Floor International organization, on the other hand, I engage a wider field of sources already described in chapter 1.4.

### 3.1 The Initial Creation of Open Floor

To start with the initial creation Open Floor, I highlight how it was the creative collaboration and coming together of several experienced conscious dance and movement teachers, which happened during 2013 and 2014. It began in 2013, when the four founders of Open Floor - Kathy Altman, Lori Saltzman, Andrea Juhan, and Vic Cooper (all situated in California, US) - created Open Floor International, which is the legal frame and organization behind Open Floor. They created this frame and organization shortly after the passing of their long-term mentor, friend, and teacher Gabrielle Roth, who, as stated, is the creator of the previously

mentioned 5Rhythms practice (which I return to later). All the four founders were in this respect close with Gabrielle Roth before she died, and they were all also teaching and practicing the 5Rhythms as some of the most senior teachers/practitioners there were. Kathy Altmann expresses in this context how she (and the other founders) needed to “chart [their] own path (Altmann 2022)” in terms of dance and movement after Roth’s passing. They therefore created Open Floor International as an organization and frame that could help them support this new practice that they wanted to manifest: Open Floor.

After this initial founding, the founders invited a “small group of seasoned teachers from around the world to form a two-month brain trust to garner ideas, opinions, and honest feedback (Open Floor International 2017: 183).” These teachers and the four founders worked collectively online over a series of months, forming the initial shape of Open Floor out of and through their individual and shared experiences, knowledges, and skills (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Our Origins’). Most of them went on to become, together with the four founders, the first working members of Open Floor International, being referred to as the ‘founding members’ of the organization. There are a total of 15 founders (4) and founding members (11). 13 are women and two are men. They are primarily teaching and living in the US (5), UK (3), Israel (2), UK/Indonesia (1), France (1), Ireland (1), The Netherlands (1), and New Zealand (1) (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Teachers’).

Open Floor is in this respect a practice that leans upon a vast realm of embodied influences and perspectives rather than on one source alone. These influences dance all the way from ancient Buddhist teachings to recent developments in neuroscience, as well as much that lie between<sup>42</sup>. They are obviously shaped by the shared pool of perspectives that the founders and founding members brought with them into the initial creation process, which Jahner (2020) refers to as ‘the interdisciplinary remix’ that these teachers embodied.

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<sup>42</sup> See chapter 3.4 for a deeper engagement of this point.

Yet, Open Floor is also dynamic. The organization and curriculum therefore keep changing and transforming as new teachers, practitioners, and perspectives enter. The current shape of Open Floor therefore looks slightly differently from the initial shape that the founders and founding members emerged. The same, I affirm, will likely be true for future Open Floor shapes. In this regard, Altman describes how “with anything that is developed, it goes through iterations. (...) If it's a living, breathing document, it needs to be allowed to shift and change (Altman 2020).” The driving aim of the beginning ‘brain trust’ was in this sense to emerge Open Floor as such a dynamic practice that could allow for continuous embodied ‘remixing’ to happen (Open Floor International 2017: 4). It was with this manifested as innovative not because it ‘creates something new out of nothing’ but because it keeps re-engaging ‘old’ wisdom in new and alternative ways (Altman 2020, Open Floor International 2017: 183). This is also key in terms of how Open Floor can emerge as dynamic while also staying stable enough. Open Floor is continuously driven by the same ‘stable’ curiosity towards ever-transforming embodied wholeness. Altmann asks:

what are the common denominators in all conscious movement practices, around the world? Ancient ones, modern ones, ones that call themselves dance, ones that absolutely do not call themselves dance. What are the common denominators that everyone teaches in order to be an embodied, grounded, conscious mover (Altman 2020)?

In Open Floor, this wide pool of embodied denominators is integrated and expressed throughout the curriculum, in the philosophical ideas that guide the practice, as well as in the teaching approaches and governance style of Open Floor International. It hence permeates Open Floor on multiple rather than on singular levels. Open Floor International emphasizes in this respect how the intentions behind unfolding Open Floor in such a dynamic manner concerns how they wanted to 1) take everyone’s wisdom seriously (structuring Open Floor International in a grass-roots manner rather than strictly hierarchically), and 2) allow for ongoing, creative ‘(re)mixing’ of embodied wisdom (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Our

Origins'<sup>43</sup>). With this, core values as well as a mission and a vision of the organization was created to help support these dynamic intentions. In the following, I highlight the current - as of 2021 - shape of these aspects.

### **3.1.1 Vision, Mission, and Core Values of Open Floor International**

The present-day (2021) vision of Open Floor International reads: “a world where conscious movement and dance ignites community, creativity, social justice, health and well-being (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Our Mission’).” This vision is supported by a mission statement, in which the potentials of dance and movement are underlined:

Open Floor International inspires people to move. We teach dance and mindful<sup>44</sup> movement for personal healing, professional growth, and community building. In a challenging world, Open Floor supports resilience, compassion, and joyous connection with others (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Our Mission’).

The current forms of the mission and vision reflect, amongst others, a prominent change from 2020 when Open Floor International became registered a non-profit organization in the US, which is where Open Floor International is legally registered. It was done to help make Open Floor become more accessible for a broader variety of individuals and groups, as well as to, to paraphrase Open Floor International, ‘give back to the community’ (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Our Origins’). Especially the term ‘social justice’ is in this context vital. It points towards how Open Floor International has started a critical process of reflection as regards which individuals and collectives are and are not (un)consciously included and excluded within the practice, organization, and field. Sparked amongst others by the Black Lives Matter movement in the US (and beyond), this process is by far completed yet has led to a growing awareness regarding issues of inclusion/exclusion, privilege, structural violence, diversity, racism, and more. It has for example resulted in a

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<sup>43</sup> This specific page on the Open Floor International homepage has changed since I wrote this part of the research. I have however access to a draft of the text as it was originally published.

<sup>44</sup> See the introductory part ‘Peaces (and Unpeaces) from the Life of a Researcher’ as regards how ‘conscious dance and movement’ is not the only term applied to describe Open Floor.

solidarity statement (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Solidarity Statement’), critical conversations regarding who are (un)intentionally included and excluded, a new Open Floor International working circle named ‘justice, equity, diversity, inclusion’ (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Our Volunteers’), as well as the already mentioned co-authored article by an Open Floor colleague and myself (Tjersland and Borovica 2021). I personally hope that this process of critical engagement will keep unfolding, as I consider it a highly necessary process to evolve. I therefore return to this process at several points throughout the inquiry, especially in relation to some of the interview encounters where the Open Floor teachers who I have interviewed themselves reflect upon and engage these crucial dynamics.

When it comes to the core values of Open Floor International, Open Floor International highlights eight core values that center around healing and creative potentials of dance and movement, as well as of inclusion, embodied wisdom, openness, and community. They read: 1) ‘movement heals’, 2) ‘movement connects us’, 3) ‘move & include’, 4) ‘Open Floor is open source’, 5) ‘everybody’s wisdom matters’, 6) ‘every dance and every body matters’, 7) ‘we dance to learn rather than learn to dance’, and 8) ‘moving forward, moving back’ (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Our Values’). One can in this context notice how Open Floor International brings both literal and metaphorical focus to dance and movement. They work with dance and movement *both* as the concrete tool for exploration - literally dancing and moving - *and* as an underlying metaphor for what it means to be alive. Humans (and other beings) *are* (dance and) movement, unfolding as an ongoing process of becoming. One can with this say that Open Floor International and the transrational peace philosophy that I lean upon share a vital core. They both work to support the potentially healing and transformative homeostatic movements that are involved in an embodied life dance.

Many of the Open Floor values furthermore emphasize inclusion. Value 5 and 6 highlight for example *everybody’s wisdom*, *every dance*, and *every body*. It refers, first, to



how Open Floor International is structured according to dynamic governance, which is an organizational form that aims to include *everybody's wisdom*<sup>45</sup>. Second, Open Floor International invites multiple dance and movement explorations rather than teaching fixed choreographies or dance steps. They therefore seek to welcome *every dance*, which also the third value 'move & include' highlights through emphasizing how all dynamics, also those that might be experienced as 'difficult' and/or 'uncomfortable', can be acknowledged ('included') and engaged ('moved')<sup>46</sup>. Third, Open Floor International aims to welcome *every body* (abled, disabled, young, old, healthy, and more) by focusing not on how dance and movement 'ought to look' but on how diverse dance and movement possibilities can be unfolded and expressed. In addition, the last value ('moving forward, moving back') underlines how authentic inclusion can in the end only happen when "those that have traditionally been privileged move back and listen, and those who have been marginalized feel safe to move forward (Open Floor International 2018: 'Our Values')."

Seeing as the ability to continuously keep moving - 'externally' and 'internally' - is so essential, Open Floor International moreover brings crucial attention to how teachers need to facilitate dance and movement in safe enough manners so that physical and/or emotional damage do not need to occur. It includes how a 'regular' Open Floor class/workshop is not therapy even if it can carry therapeutic potentials (Open Floor International 2017: 131-132, see also Diamond 2007: 58)<sup>47</sup>. Open Floor International used to highlight this explicitly through one of their previous values phrased 'some things need more than dance to heal'. It therefore underlines how "most of the time our organisms are quite trustworthy (Open Floor International 2017: 130)" yet at times these organisms might need some added support to help find their ways (Open Floor International 2017: 131-140). I personally consider this a key ethical principle that is embedded into the teaching approach that Open Floor advocates.

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<sup>45</sup> See also the following subchapter for a deeper engagement with dynamic governance.

<sup>46</sup> See also my engagement of this value in relation to the interview with Marisu in chapter 4.2.4.

<sup>47</sup> Some teachers are however trained to facilitate what is called 'Therapy in Motion'. See chapter 3.4.

### 3.1.2 Creative Commons and Dynamic Governance

When it comes to how Open Floor is licensed - *Creative Commons* - and to how Open Floor International is structured - *dynamic governance* - I underline how this licensing and organizational form were chosen by the founders and founding members to support the already engaged intentions of openness, dynamism, transparency, and sharing. The *Creative Commons* licensing ensures in this regard how all Open Floor material can be used and reused by everyone inside and outside of Open Floor International, as long as 1) attributions are given to the material creator(s), and 2) material is shared onwards under the same conditions (Open Floor International 2018: 'Creative Commons', Creative Commons n.a). It is therefore legal for everyone to apply the embodied wisdom that they encounter in Open Floor as long as they are transparent about where they have encountered this wisdom from.

The organizational structure of *dynamic governance* - or sociocracy as it is also called (Rau and Koch-Gonzalez 2018) - facilitates furthermore the intention to keep Open Floor dynamic. All volunteer working members<sup>48</sup> are in this sense sought to be taken seriously and given space to make contributions related to ongoing development of the organization and practice (Open Floor International 2017: 183). Open Floor International works in this context in circles rather than in more traditional hierarchical frames, with each circle being responsible for different aspects and elements. It helps honor what Open Floor International calls the key values of the dynamic governance process. They are 1) *equivalence* (all members function as collaborative peers rather than as competitors and/or in hierarchal roles), 2) *effectiveness* (decisions are taken with consent rather than consensus, aiming to ensure that everyone is on board), and 3) *transparency* (all circle members are given direct access to notes and information) (Open Floor International 2018: 'Dynamic Governance'). As I am writing this third research chapter - September 2021 - working circles include 'tech circle', 'marketing circle', 'finance circle', 'program implementation circle', 'educational

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<sup>48</sup> Most of the work in Open Floor International is noticeably based on volunteerism.

programs circle’, ‘general circle’, ‘membership circle’, and ‘top circle’ (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Our Volunteers’).

### **3.1.3 The Dynamism Involved in Teaching Open Floor**

As an additional aspect, I emphasize how the processes of dynamism, ongoing change, and creative freedom are also visible as regards how Open Floor International invites its teachers to engage Open Floor in diverse rather than in one-dimensional manners. They thus accentuate how the Open Floor curriculum is “a flexible framework to practice embodiment (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Our Curriculum),” encouraging its teachers to explore their unique ways of teaching Open Floor rather than imposing a ‘One universal format’. Focus is with this placed on the possibility to integrate Open Floor in diverse contexts, communities, and fields, which I also embody through my unique ‘Open Floor and peace approach’. In this regard, when I explain Open Floor in the following, I provide a *current* overview of a *collective* Open Floor shape rather than a universal description of how all teachers engage it. I therefore emphasize how I consider Open Floor to be a fundamentally *elicitive* (Lederach 1995) practice, revolving around the embodied needs and resources of the contexts and people involved. This, I affirm, is also a key reason for why I chose to engage precisely Open Floor as a peace-unfolding practice (see also Tjersland 2019).

### **3.2 Gabrielle Roth, The 5Rhythms Practice, and Conscious Dance and Movement**

Moving with this to the sociocultural-historical dynamics that move behind Open Floor, I emphasize to begin with Gabrielle Roth and her 5Rhythms practice, as well as the wider field of conscious dance and movement. The latter is a field to which the 5Rhythms is a pioneering influence, which is perhaps the most prominent, yet not the only, aspect as regards how the inspiration from 5Rhythms is visible in Open Floor. I have in this context already described how all the teachers involved in the initial creation of Open Floor - founders and founding members alike - were trained as 5Rhythms teachers from before. Jahner (2020) therefore

emphasizes how the many years of 5Rhythms experience that these teachers carried became a vital bond and birthing place out of which Open Floor could also begin to unfold. In a similar vein, Juhan contends how she has “been in mentorship with Gabrielle Roth for over 25 years (Juhan 2007: 77).”

Conscious dance and movement is in this respect a field of dance and movement practices that, as emphasized, do not work with fixed choreographies or dance steps. They rather, in elicitive ways, tap into dance and movement as naturally emerging processes that dynamically unfold through and between embodied-relational wholes. They therefore, without involving external audiences, invite a variety of embodied processes to manifest through spontaneous dance and movement engagements. It can include processes of embodied healing, relationship to self and others, mindfulness, creativity, and more. There are currently a variety of conscious dance and movement practices existing, with each practice carrying unique focuses, curriculums, teachings, and more. Nonetheless, aspects such as embodied relationality, music, transpersonal dynamics, emotionality, and others are usually always included in one way or another.

All conscious dance and movement practices furthermore invite a certain quality of embodied (self)awareness (Fogel 2009) into the work, guiding movers and dancers to not just mechanically ‘do the movement’ but to embody the movement - or at least practice embodying the movement - with and through their embodied-relational wholes (see also Azul 2018). How different practices invite such a quality of (self)awareness varies, yet it is an invitation that often includes bringing embodied focus to self, to others, to group, to space, to more. I have in this respect, as mentioned, previously described my understanding of the term ‘conscious dance and movement practice’ related to how I teach Open Floor as such:

as I work with it, ‘conscious’ refers to the key focus on embodied awareness of oneself and the surroundings during the practice that is highlighted in Open Floor, while ‘dance and movement’ refers to the main modality through which the work is being done - the body *in movement*. ‘Practice’ refers to the focus on creating a space

where students can explore and engage with different dynamics again and again without having to be ‘right or wrong’ (Tjersland 2019. Emphasis in original).

As a pioneering influence behind this dance and movement field, Gabrielle Roth and her 5Rhythms practice becomes with this vital. I focus in this sense on the relevant aspects from Roth’s own life rather than on describing the 5Rhythms practice in detail, thus following Juhan in that many aspects from Roth’s life greatly helped shaped the ongoing development of the 5Rhythms (Juhan 2003: 77). Consequently, these aspects have helped co-chape Open Floor. Roth was in this regard born in San Francisco, California, US in 1941. She was from early onwards drawn towards religious/spiritual questions and explorations, which she describes as a “gnawing hunger for rituals of spirit (Roth 1998b: xv).” Her ongoing self-relationship was furthermore deeply co-shaped by the experiences that she encountered out of this ‘spiritual hunger’ of hers - for better and for worse. It is amongst others visible related to how she attended Catholic school. Even though this school experience helped her connect to a larger spiritual meaning, the religious-moral education she thus received also began to emerge a strained self-relationship. Roth explains how she started to judge her body as sinful, especially related to her sexuality and sensuality. She states how “by thirteen I was a wreck. My body was blossoming; every day some new part of me turned on that had to be turned off. (...) I was scared to death of the woman emerging from deep within my bones (...) (Roth 1998b: xvii). Aided also by a rigorous training in classical ballet where much focus was on bodily control and ‘lightness’, Roth ended up developing struggles with anorexia in her teens as a consequence of this challenging self-relationship (Roth 1998a: 6-7).

Processes of embodied healing became in this manner a driving force behind much of Roth’s teachings and works. It is also true regards the 5Rhythms practice. Roth describes in this context how she could through her practice and work slowly begin to evolve a process of re-embracing herself as an embodied whole, gradually transforming the ‘split’ between her ‘good mind/spirit’ and her ‘sinful body’ into a deeper relationship of wholeness (Roth

1998ab). For this, she was not only helped by dance and movement but also by the spiritual connection that she valued so deeply. Amongst others, it happened through engaging shamanic inspirations and meditation/self-actualization techniques<sup>49</sup>, as well as through engaging creativity and arts<sup>50</sup>. Roth expresses: “my work is a marriage of art and healing meant to catalyze wholeness through dance, song, poetry, ritual, and meditation. I have learned through suffering and experimenting how to transform daily life into sacred art (Roth 1989: 2 quoted in Juhan 2003: 77).” Juhan similarly describes the 5Rhythms practice as a ‘healing art and meditation’, referring to Roth as a “postmodern voice of shamanic practice (Juhan 2007: 78).” This phrasing comes from how Roth herself often used the term ‘urban shaman’ to understand herself as a wounded healer, contending how “to be a Shaman means to be a wounded healer (Roth quoted in Diliberto 2012).” “It means somebody who has fallen apart and put themselves back together again (Roth quoted in Diliberto 2012)<sup>51</sup>.” One of Roth’s most famous sentences in terms of how she invited these healing processes to unfold makes in this context candidly visible how important the engagement of *dance and movement* became: “I trust that if you put the psyche in motion, it will heal itself (Roth 1998b: 8).” With it, processes of *embodied healing, spirituality, creativity/arts*, as well as ongoing engagements of *dance and movement* are crucial dynamics to be aware of when it comes to the 5Rhythms practice - as well as to, consequently, Open Floor.

I highlight in this regard the prominent roots that the 5Rhythms (and Open Floor) also carry within humanistic and transpersonal approaches to psychology<sup>52</sup>. Humanistic and

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<sup>49</sup> Juhan mentions Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (Osho), psychic healers in the Philippines, shamanic traditions of Native Americans, Oscar Ichazo and the Arica school for spiritual development, as well as several pioneers of humanistic (and transpersonal) psychology, including Fritz Perls, Dick Price, Michael Murphy, Gregory Bateson, Ida Rolf, and Joseph Campbell (see Juhan 2005: 78-81).

<sup>50</sup> Roth was not only trained in and worked with dance - especially ballet, modern dance, and later the 5Rhythms practice - but also worked with theatre, music, as well as writing (Juhan 2003: 78-81, Roth 1998ab).

<sup>51</sup> According to Diliberto however, Roth never claimed to have explicitly trained in indigenous shamanic traditions. Her phrasing ‘urban shaman’ therefore needs to be seen in the light that Roth herself describes it; as a wounded healer (Diliberto 2012).

<sup>52</sup> Humanistic psychology is referred to as the ‘third’ force of psychology. It is recognized by a shift in the understanding of healing and therapy that moves towards processes of love, creativity, connection, peak

transpersonal approaches do not understand healing as a ‘curing’ or a ‘fixing’ but as an imperfect process of unfolding (Rogers 1961, Perls 1973, Maslow 2014, Marrone 1990, Daniels 2005, Grof and Grof 2010, Dietrich 2013, 2018). It hence associates with the core root of the word ‘healing’ itself, which is connected to dynamics of wholeness (Onions 1966: 432). Thus, a humanistic/transpersonal approach to healing makes it possible to emerge healing without ‘being therapy’ (see Juhan 2005: 77). It can therefore help prevent harmful attempts to do therapy when the teacher and/or setting is not adequately set up/trained to do so. Furthermore, it renders practices such as the 5Rhythms and Open Floor free to also move beyond therapy to directly touch processes such as love, inspiration, creativity, peaces, and more. Roth got in this respect in contact with humanistic and transpersonal ideas in the end of the 1960’s when she stayed and taught at the Esalen Institute in California, US. The Esalen Institute is an educational ‘growth’ center (Puttick 2000: 204) that was founded in 1962, dedicated to exploring human potentials and alternative realms of consciousness. It is moreover considered a key hub of the Human Potential Movement, which is a movement that I explore as another key influence behind Open Floor in the next subchapter 3.3.

Roth came to the Esalen Institute in her early twenties when she was experiencing an episode of depression after a knee injury that made it difficult for her to continue her training in modern dance (Juhan 2005: 79). In Esalen, however, she re-discovered that she could “move even though [she] couldn’t ‘dance’ (Roth 1998a: 18).” Mentored by Fritz Perls - the humanistic psychologist behind the term ‘contact boundary at work’ (Perls 1973) - she started with this to teach dance and movement to different Esalen groups. It was in this context that she first encountered the beginning shape of the 5Rhythms practice:

for the next three years Esalen was an intense laboratory for the development of my work. (...) I came to see that we were all suffering from “trizophrenia”: thinking one thing, feeling another, acting out a third. (...) But for reasons I hardly knew, moving

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experiences, compassion, and more rather than (only) towards pathologies and deficiencies. Transpersonal psychology builds upon these humanistic approaches yet explores human existence particularly in connection to larger realms. ‘Transpersonal’ means beyond/through the personal. See Daniels 2005, Dietrich 2013, 2018.

started pulling them [the participants] together, gave them a sense of center, kindled a spark of spirit. Everyday I discovered that if you just put people in motion, they'll heal themselves (Roth 1998a: 18-20).

One can with this say that the 5Rhythms, to a certain degree, is a practice that unfolded out of Roth's realization regarding how several persons in the context of Esalen suffered from an experience of 'not being whole' - of feeling separated into incompatible and conflicting 'parts'. This is an experience that I have previously named 'disembodied' in this research. Second, the 5Rhythms can, to a certain degree, be said to emerge out of Roth's observations regarding how dance and movement could unfold processes through which these same persons could find ways to reconnect to themselves and each other as embodied wholes again. This is a process that I might choose to, and have perhaps already done, name embodied wholeness and healing in this research. Keeping in mind the core influence from 5Rhythms onto Open Floor, therefore, I might also argue that Open Floor is a practice that, to a certain degree, aims to (re)unfold embodied dynamics of wholeness and healing through engaging dance and movement. This is at least *one* key dynamic that I contend keeps driving Open Floor, its teachers, as well as many of its dancers and movers.

### **3.2.1 Movement as Continuums and Embodied Anchors**

As a core element that, amongst others, emerge out of this strong influence that the 5Rhythms has had on Open Floor, I (re)emphasize the focus that Open Floor carries on *dance and movement* as the central resource and tool for exploration. Open Floor International defines in this context an essential quality of movement, underlining how movement always manifest on continuums (Open Floor International 2017: 12). Crucially therefore, the moment a movement reaches a final end-state it ceases to be movement altogether. Balance, thus, is "a moment in time rather than a goal (Open Floor International 2018: 'Resources')." It echoes with this the previously engaged transrational peace philosophy (Dietrich 2012, 2013, 2018, Echavarría Alvarez et al. 2018, Koppensteiner 2020, Ditzel Facci 2020, Tjersland and Ditzel



Facci 2019), as well as imperfect notion of peaces (Muñoz 2006). Furthermore, it re-emphasizes the embodied-relational practice of constantly allowing oneself to transform through multiple, relational encounters (Koppensteiner 2009, Tjersland 2019).

Out of this awareness of movement as continuums, Open Floor teachers are trained to look both for what *is* moving and for what is *not* moving within and between individuals and groups in a class/workshop. They can with this help guide new movement possibilities, facilitating ways that old patterns transform and new ones emerge. With it, they potentially help facilitate embodied explorations into new and different ways that individuals and groups can also move differently, helping to emerge widened possibilities for creativity, fluidity, and choice. The movement continuums function in this manner as embodied tools that can help dancers and movers widen their before discussed ‘windows of tolerance’ (Siegel 2011), gradually allowing for a broader engagement of life. Currently, Open Floor International defines four movement continuums that they work with. They are: 1) *Fixed and Fluid* (the balance between embodying rigidity/stability and mobility/freedom), 2) *Include and Exclude* (the balance between including and excluding different facets of experience), 3) *Habit and Choice* (the balance between being grounded in life-affirming habits and being open for new possibilities), as well as 4) *Absence and Presence* (the balance between being present and physically/emotionally withdrawing if needed) (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Resources’).

Another crucial element that can be tied to the core influence from the 5Rhythms (yet also a wider field of embodied approaches) concerns how Open Floor brings attention to what is called *embodied anchors*. They are “a sensate experience in a part of the body (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Introduction & Overview’),” emerging as embodied attention to concrete body parts - for example the chest - that help anchor both dancers and movers as well as the dance and movement explorations in an embodied dimension. They help with this manifest Open Floor as an *embodied* practice, functioning both as ‘gateways’ into embodied

awareness as well as embodied places to return to if and when individuals and groups struggle to keep their embodied awareness present. “Just like the anchor of a boat provides weight that anchors it into the ground, a movement anchor has weight that holds our awareness in the physical body (...) Embodied anchors provide a place to start our explorations and a place we can return to (Open Floor International 2017: 34).”

This basic focus on movement as well as on physical and sensate awareness can in this context, as mentioned, not only be recognized from the 5Rhythms practice but also from other embodied approaches. It includes somatic approaches to therapy (Marrone 1990, Levine 2010), Gendlin’s (2007) ‘focusing’ approach, as well as more. In the field of (peace) facilitation, Koppensteiner contends how “embodied grounding is a necessary precondition for holding (one’s own and another person’s) experience (Koppensteiner 2020: 188).” The elements of embodied anchors and movement as continuums can therefore be said to be two of those ‘key embodied principles’ that the founders and founding members of Open Floor International wanted to engage when they created Open Floor. They thus unfold as a basic awareness of and engagement with sensate, embodied experience, which stands out as crucial in any approach that seeks to authentically include the embodied reality of life.

### **3.3 The Human Potential Movement**

As another (interconnected) sociocultural-historical influence that move behind Open Floor, I underline the already mentioned Human Potential Movement and the roots that this movement, as with the 5Rhythms practice, carries in humanistic and transpersonal approaches to psychology. The Human Potential Movement is a culture and movement that radiated out of especially California in the 1960’s and 70’s, amongst others connected to the before mentioned Esalen Institute (see Dietrich 2013: 25-44). According to Jahner (2020), it is a movement that many - if not all(?) - of the founders and founding members of Open Floor were engaged within. It is therefore not only through Gabrielle Roth and her 5Rhythms

practice that the creators of Open Floor were inspired by humanistic and transpersonal ideas. Rather, it also happened through diverse dynamics that they brought from different angles. This is an interesting aspect to observe in relation to how the manifold influences and inspirations behind Open Floor also intertwine.

The term ‘Human Potential Movement’ is a debated term. According to Puttick, many of the practitioners and teachers associated with the movement would prefer words such as ‘growth centers’ or no label at all to describe their practice and work (Puttick 2000: 203). It is therefore an umbrella term that encompasses a wide variety of people, centers, and schools of thought rather than a clearly defined and homogenous mass. Some of the people, centers, and schools of thought associated with the term would willingly place themselves at the center of it while others would linger in the peripheries, being guided by similar philosophies and approaches yet not necessarily name themselves as such. The Human Potential Movement has thus “always consisted of loose congeries of individuals, centres and schools of thought, some of whom saw themselves in alliance as the vanguard of a new wave of consciousness, while others disagreed fiercely with each other (Puttick 2000: 203).” It is therefore key to recognize it precisely as a *movement*: as a current and focus that - more or less and to a certain degree - carry in a similar direction.

The Human Potential Movement can with this perhaps best be described as ‘the psychospiritual wing’ of the counterculture that spread especially yet not exclusively in the US and other parts of the so-called ‘Western’ world in the 1960’s and 70’s (Puttick 2000: 204). It was particularly focused on exploring human potentials related to personal (psychological) and transpersonal (spiritual) realms, originating “as an experimental rebellion against mainstream psychology and organized religion (Puttick 2000: 201).” It gathered in this sense much inspiration from, amongst others, theories and authors who argued a resonance between humanistic/transpersonal perspectives from the ‘West’ and

religious/spiritual perspectives from the 'East' It hence came to be known as a movement where 'West and East met' (Richert 2018, Puttick 2000, see also parts of Campbell 2007). This is also visible in Open Floor, for example through the integration of Buddhist and Yogic-inspired approaches to meditation and mindfulness. Nevertheless, I underline how a sharp difference between 'East' and 'West' is questionable, as culture is fluid and dynamic rather than static and isolated. Furthermore, these 'Western-Eastern' ideas have often, although not only, been interpreted and unfolded out of a North American and/or European center point. The 'meeting between East and West' therefore needs to be seen with a critical awareness regarding this sociocultural and geographical dynamic. It can, and has, for example influence(d) how a so-called 'Eastern' has been and might be engaged in practices such as Open Floor. It is therefore vital to keep this critical awareness in mind alongside the more affirmative influences that a movement such as The Human Potential Movement has had and is having upon Open Floor<sup>53</sup>.

I recognize in this respect how there are issues of privilege, power, and structural inequalities that the Human Potential Movement - as with the society that it was part of - did not escape, and which practices that are inspired by this movement, including Open Floor, therefore need to keep engaging. Goldman (2012) raises for example questions about power and privilege related to class, social status, and gender at the Esalen Institute, whereas I recognize the importance of discussing sociocultural blind spots (Chang in Chaiklin and Wengrower 2009) as well as dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. It is in this sense vital to keep reflecting on how Open Floor (as well as my inquiry) is always part of and embedded into a certain lived context, continuously returning to how Open Floor can also keep transforming and unfolding anew - when and wherever this transformation is needed.

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<sup>53</sup> A similar point can, I affirm, also be related to a comparable tendency - although not prominent in Open Floor - to, at times uncritically integrate Indigenous perspectives into diverse practices and approaches without having the sufficient cultural knowledge (and/or respect) that is needed (see Brunk and Young 2009).

On a more affirmative note - even though it can be questioned how widely inclusive The Human Potential Movement has been on all levels, as well as its legacy still is, once diverse dynamics of power and privilege are taken into account - The Human Potential Movement has helped trailblaze what Goldman (2012) calls a ‘democratization of spiritual privilege’. It concerns how The Human Potential Movement was driven by an underlying understanding regarding how *all* humans, irrespective of background, have access to a web of innate resources that can help them live more creative, fulfilling, and, I add, peaceful lives (Puttick 2000). It has thus helped advocate an approach where spiritual experience and self-actualization is seen as more accessible than what hierarchical structures in organized religion have previously tended to confirm (Goldman 2012), proceeding “from the assumption that every human being can explore the extremes of consciousness (Dietrich 2018: 7).” The Human Potential Movement was in this respect, as touched upon, inspired by amongst others humanistic and transpersonal ideas, which is especially relevant related to the theories of Abraham Maslow, who was a pioneering influence behind both humanistic and transpersonal fields (Daniels 2005, Koppensteiner 2020, Dietrich 2013).

Maslow is famous for proposing how humans are motivated by fulfilling a ‘hierarchy of needs’. It ranges from basic physiological survival needs to ‘higher’ growth needs of self-actualization<sup>54</sup> (Maslow 1943). The latter quest for self-actualization additionally unfolds capacities for transpersonal experiences (Maslow 1993, 2014). Even though it can be question how strictly hierarchical this ‘hierarchy of needs’ ultimately is - which is not a discussion that I enter in-depth in this research - I emphasize how the most important aspect for this research concerns how Maslow does not understand the process of fulfilling needs as pathological or ‘evil’ but as ‘neutral’ or ‘good’ (Koppensteiner 2020: 23). This makes his theories unfold an optimistic rather than a pathological/sinful outlook on the human dance,

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<sup>54</sup> Maslow does however not understand higher as better but interprets ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ literally. ‘Higher’ growth needs rest upon an underlying (‘lower’) ground of needs that are directly related to safety and survival (Maslow 2014).

emphasizing potentials for love, empathy, self-actualization, and more. It hence provides an alternative to the more ‘pessimistic’ views embedded into traditional psychotherapy and conservative religious moralism (Puttick 2000). Amongst others, it has helped (re)advocate a wholeness-focused approach - or at least a beginning understanding of this wholeness - where a strict separation between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ can be questioned and potentially transformed. This has helped inspire the Human Potential Movement (Puttick 2000: 204), the explorations that happened at the Esalen Institute (Goldman 2012), Open Floor, as well as, I confirm, this current research inquiry.

### **3.3.1 The Movement Cycle**

One of the elements in Open Floor that carries direct links to the Human Potential Movement (yet also to the 5Rhythms practice<sup>55</sup>), is in this sense the already mentioned *movement cycle*, which I have structured the research upon (see introduction). It is, as engaged, a map that Open Floor teachers use to structure their classes and workshops, helping them guide multiple embodied explorations into multiple embodied dynamics. It functions with this as a tool that both teachers and dancers/movers can use to navigate a variety of dance/movement processes. At the same time, it is a metaphorical image for how life constantly moves through a series of interconnected cycles; some of which are larger life stories, others which are smaller, everyday moments. Similarly, in Open Floor, movement cycles can be “as short as a song (...)” or “as long as a 2-3 hour session (Open Floor International 2017: 28).” No cycle furthermore ends up the exact same place as it started, which is why the movement cycle is drawn as a spiral rather than a full circle (Open Floor International 2018: ‘A Movement Cycle for Life’). In the introductory chapter, I have described the four processes that are involved in the movement cycle. They are: *Open Attention*, *Enter*, *Explore*, and *Settle*.

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<sup>55</sup> The 5Rhythms works with a similar although different ‘map’, which consists of, precisely, five different rhythms that together move through what is referred to as a ‘wave’. These five rhythms are: *Flowing*, *Staccato*, *Chaos*, *Lyrical*, and *Stillness*. See Roth 1998a for more information.

The movement cycle is directly inspired from Gestalt Awareness Practice, which is a practice unfolded by Christine and Richard Price (Price 2009-2020, Open Floor International 2017: 27) - the latter being one of the founders of the Esalen Institute (Juhan 2003: 23). Juhan mentions how Gestalt Awareness practice has for her been a vital inspiration, describing it as an embodied exploration of what *is*, which centers around the intention to follow “a process to its organic conclusion (Juhan 2003: 165).” It thus involves being in touch with both ‘painful’ and ‘pleasurable’ sensations without attempting to ‘control’ any of these sensations. According to Juhan: “feeling good is not the primary goal in Gestalt Awareness Practice; instead, value is placed on learning the ability to be *in touch* with what is - both positive and what is commonly considered negative or unpleasant states (Juhan 2003: 165. Emphasis in original).” One can with this see similarities with how I have described the process of embodied peaces related to the endeavor of ‘dancing life’s wholeness’ at the end of chapter 2.

### **3.3.2 The 4x4 Weave of Experience**

Another aspect of Open Floor that associates with the Human Potential Movement and its humanistic and transpersonal roots (as well as, again, with the 5Rhythms practice) is the *4x4 weave of experience*. It represents the core interpretation that Open Floor builds upon as regards what the process of being human implies, functioning as “the terrain of all our teaching and all our dances (Open Floor International 2017: 14).” It therefore serves as an underlying map that guides Open Floor teachers as well as dancers and movers to tap into themselves and each other as embodied-relational wholes. Vitally however, Dietrich highlights a crucial point regarding maps, building upon a phrase attributed to Alfred Korzybski. He emphasizes how a map is not the reality. Rather, maps “provide us with ideas, approaches and aids in dealing with reality. (...) [Maps] provide structure and orientation (Dietrich 2018: 5).” This is essential. The 4x4 weave is not a claim to ‘Truth’ but an attempt to orient and deeper understand the process of being alive through creating a systematized

framework through which this process can be approached. Altman affirms: “every (...) practice has its own set of principles. Ours [Open Floor] just happen to fall into this category. (...) It's pretty simple. (...) We call it the 4x4 weave. (...) It could have been something else (Altman 2020).” As an Open Floor teacher, thus, I use the 4x4 weave of experience to orient, highlight, and engage the process of being alive without falling into the trap of reducing the dance to this map itself. In chapter 1, I have touched upon what this 4x4 map involves, bringing attention to four *dimensions of embodiment* and four *relational hungers*.

The first part of the 4x4 weave - the four relational hungers - underlines how humans are *relational*. It hence involves four basic relationships that humans continuously seek to engage - ‘hunger’ for - in dynamic and interconnected manners. It implies that all the relational hungers are equally important, always present, and fundamentally intertwined. It is therefore first and foremost the intensity and quality of how different relational hungers show up and are sensed, felt, intuited, and thought within unique moments and contexts that is important. This makes Open Floor teachers facilitate ongoing explorations into how different relational hungers move in and out of a variety of foregrounds and backgrounds during a class/workshop (Open Floor International 2017: 14-22).

Altman furthermore expresses how the phrasing ‘hunger’ associates with a continuum of movement that moves within, between, and through experiences of malnourishment, well-nourishment, and oversaturation (Altman 2020). Individuals and collectives can with this, metaphorically speaking, feel either ‘over-saturated’ or ‘malnourished’ - imbalanced - in relation to one hunger in one context while they can feel ‘well-nourished’ - balanced - in relation to the same hunger in another context. There is correspondingly never a perfect end-state where individuals and groups ‘ought to end up’ but continuous navigations through ever changing dynamics (Open Floor International 2017: 19). Open Floor teachers seek in this context to facilitate ongoing explorations into new and different ways that dynamic balances



can potentially evolve. The four relational hungers are: *Solitude* (relations to oneself), *Connection* (relations to close/intimate others), *Belonging* (relations to groups/communities) and *Spirit* (relations to something ‘larger’) (Open Floor International 2017: 19-22).

The other part of the 4x4 weave is focused upon humans as *embodied* processes, highlighting four different dimensions of embodiment. They are: *physical body*, *emotional body*, *embodied mind*, and *embodied soul* (Open Floor International 2017: 15). All the aspects related to dynamism and interconnectedness discussed above is in this sense equally valid for the embodied side of the 4x4 weave. It means, for example, that Open Floor does not understand ‘mind’ as a disembodied brain or ‘emotional’ as feelings separated from the physical body. On the contrary, “we separate them [the four dimensions of embodiment (as well as the four relational hungers)] only to understand their particular essences; together they compromise an inseparable weave of our humanness (Open Floor International 2017: 14)” It is with this the same paradoxical understanding as I have argued before. Humans are *both* inseparable wholes *and* abilities to create categories that help guide their attention towards and away from unique dynamics and aspects.

Even though all four dimensions of embodiment are with this essential, there is one dimension particularly that serves as a founding ground in Open Floor. It is the physical dimension of embodiment; the sensate awareness of being present in space and time. Without this layer, it is difficult to connect to other embodied dimensions and experiences (Fogel 2009, van der Kolk 2014, Tjersland 2019, Open Floor International 2017: 15, Koppensteiner 2020: 188). The physical body serves in this manner as a core anchor and entry point from where further explorations can happen. It is amongst others because of this that Open Floor calls itself an *embodied* practice. “The core healing of Open Floor is to literally inhabit our bodies (Open Floor International 2017: 15).”

Inspirations behind the 4x4 weave can, as mentioned, be traced back to the Human Potential Movement and its roots in humanistic and transpersonal psychology as well as to the 5Rhythms practice. Jahner (2020) expresses for example how the similar, although different, five-fold ‘map’ of the 5Rhythms - body, heart, mind, soul, and spirit (Roth 1998a) - is a crucial inspiration. Furthermore, Jahner mentions Carl Gustav Jung (1964) and refers to the four functions that Jung argued related to how humans perceive and make meaning out of their experiences. Jung is, notably, an influential forerunner to both humanistic and transpersonal psychology alike (Koppensteiner 2020: 21). The four functions that Jung highlights are 1) sensing (physical body in Open Floor), 2) feeling (emotional body in Open Floor), 3) thinking (embodied mind in Open Floor), and 4) intuiting (embodied soul in Open Floor) (Jung 1964). Koppensteiner furthermore proposes a similar map related to peace research and facilitation, building, amongst others, upon Roth and Jung to explore the human endeavor of knowing through five interconnected dimensions. They are: somatic knowing through the body (sensing), empathic and affective knowing through the heart (feeling), intellectual knowing through the mind (thinking), intuitive knowing through the soul (intuiting), and transpersonal knowing through spirit (witnessing) (Koppensteiner 2020).

### **3.4 Moving into Further Possibilities: Integrating New Perspectives from Arts, Anatomy, Academia, Mindfulness, Neuroscience, Therapy, and More**

As a final main point to engage, I re-highlight how Open Floor continuously seeks to ‘remix’ a multitude of embodied wisdom. The founders and founding members of Open Floor International therefore wanted Open Floor to be more than (only) a continuation of the 5Rhythms practice and its humanistic/transpersonal roots, seeking to engage an ongoing deepening of multifaceted embodied wisdom through integrating a variety of perspectives (Altman 2020, Jahner 2020). It is, as mentioned, based upon the wide array of perspectives that the founders and founding members brought with them into the initial creation process,

yet also upon diverse perspectives that new teachers bring as they dynamically become part of the Open Floor teaching community. Open Floor, thus, is colored by several further perspectives than what I have emphasized so far. It ranges from arts (visual arts, theatre, creative writing), therapy/psychology (attachment theory, trauma theories, somatic approaches), anatomy, neuroscience, Buddhist, Yogic, and Taoist approaches to mindfulness and meditation, as well as more. It is not an exhaustive list, yet it helps paint a picture of the diverse field of influences that moves behind Open Floor.

Without going into details about these many different perspectives involved, I underline, first, how there are several other specializations in terms of facilitating Open Floor next to the more ‘regular’ form of teaching that I primarily engage in this research. It includes a specialization previously named *Libido* - yet which currently, as of Spring 2021, is in the process of being renamed ‘embodied sexuality’ - which revolves around dynamics of sexuality, intimacy, relationship, and ‘life force’ from an embodied perspective (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Libido’, see also chapter 4.4). It furthermore includes *Art in Motion*, which centers around the integration of diverse art modalities together with dancing and moving (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Art in Motion’). *Open Floor Encounter* describes in turn a specific process/way of using Open Floor/dance and movement - which, as mentioned, was unfolded by Andrea Juhan and which is largely described in her doctoral dissertation (Juhan 2003). *Therapy in Motion* refers to a therapeutic approach where Open Floor teachers who are also trained as therapists from before work with people either one-to-one or in small groups with explicit therapeutic intentions (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Open Floor Therapy in Motion’, see also chapter 4.2). I focus as mentioned upon the more ‘regular’ expression of Open Floor in this inquiry, yet I unfold, as engaged, my unique approach to this expression through focusing on embodied dynamics of peaces particularly.

A second point that I highlight concerns how perspectives from psychology/therapy are also integrated into the more ‘standard’ Open Floor. It is amongst due to Andrea Juhan’s (as well as other founding members’) professional experience in the therapy field (Jahner 2020, Juhan 2003). Nevertheless, this inspiration from psychology/therapy is not integrated with the intention to facilitate explicit therapeutic processes but translates into a key focus on *emotional intelligence* (Open Floor International 2017: 111-148). Multiple insights from neuroscience, attachment theory, trauma research, mindfulness, as well as more are in this respect involved into how Open Floor approaches this emotional field (Open Floor International 2017), understanding emotional intelligence to unfold as a process that includes a variety of intra-interpersonal competencies that needs to be continuously (re)practiced and (re)engaged. There is consequently “no such thing as perfectly lasting emotional balance. What we experience are periods of equilibrium in between episodes of distress, loss or confusion (Open Floor International 2017: 112).” Open Floor International therefore asks: “how quickly can we [humans] bring awareness, repair and steadiness [back] to our system? (Open Floor International 2017: 112).”

Open Floor International leans in this context, amongst others, upon the previously discussed ‘window of tolerance’ (Siegel 2011), which they have noticeably renamed ‘the window of presence’. This slight change of name underlines how the focus lies not only on ‘tolerating’ different experiences but on affirmatively staying present with and engage a multiplicity of life flavors. In an Open Floor class/workshop, teachers seek in this regard to facilitate ongoing embodied explorations how individuals and groups can expand diverse ‘windows of tolerance/presence’ in resourceful manners rather than in ways that ‘push’ them into hyper or hypoaroused states (Open Floor International 2017: 114-116). Furthermore, Open Floor International underlines a focus on differentiation, which they understand to be “an embodied cognitive emotional skill that is necessary in all aspects of life, both on and off

the dance floor (Open Floor International 2017: 123).” It implies that ‘mental’ capacities to observe and be aware of/reflect upon what is happening without immediately acting or judging are vital, (re)including embodiment as a paradoxical both-and process of mind-body (as well as more) wholeness. Currently, Open Floor International works with four differentiation processes. They are: differentiating ‘me from you’, ‘past from present’, ‘story from sensation’, ‘intent from impact’ (Open Floor International 2017: 123).

I underline with this how the core focus on emotional intelligence in Open Floor is an important reason for why it unfolds as a qualitatively different, although related, practice as compared to the 5Rhythms. It is an integration of further perspectives - including van der Kolk 2014, Siegel 2011, 2020, Ogden et al. 2006, Davidson and Begley 2012, Richo 2008, and more<sup>56</sup> - that, amongst others, makes processes of ‘mind’ as well as ‘inner-outer’ relationality become more explicitly (re)emphasized. It is true even though ‘mental’ and relational dynamics are also included in the 5Rhythms practice. The dynamic of ‘inner-outer’ relationality is in this regard more explicitly underlined because emotional intelligence is understood as a process that always unfolds in relational manners (Open Floor International 2017, 2018, Tjersland 2019). Processes of ‘mind’ are in turn more explicitly highlighted because ‘mental’ capacities to *also* (rather than only) differentiate, along with other cognitive dynamics, are seen as crucial. It is therefore, I underline, not all too different from the ongoing integrative and differentiating process of homeostatic engagement that I have continuously emphasized in relation to embodied peaces during my discussion so far.

### **3.4.1 Core Movement Resources**

One important focus in Open Floor that, amongst others, emerges out of this emphasis on emotional intelligence is in this respect *core movement resources*. They are ways in which bodies can move - physically, emotionally, mentally, and soulfully - expressing key

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<sup>56</sup> Open Floor International lists these sources, along with several others, as suggested resources for Open Floor teachers to read in relation to emotional intelligence (Open Floor International 2017: 129).

movement vocabulary and movement possibilities (Open Floor International 2017: 23-26, Open Floor International 2018: ‘A Resource Based Movement Practice’). They emerge in this manner as holistic ‘inner-outer’ processes that dancers and movers can engage both on and off the dance floor to navigate and literally *move* the multiple relationships, dynamics, and aspects of their lives (see also Tjersland 2019). Open Floor International currently works with ten core movement resources. They are: *Ground, Center, Spatial Awareness, Expand & Contract, Release, Towards & Away, Activate & Settle, Dissolve, Vector, and Pause* (Open Floor International 2018: ‘A Resource Based Movement Practice’). In a class/workshop, these core movement resources can be practiced and explored in a variety of ways, including through dance/movement exercises, ‘mental’ reflections, as well as more.

Altman expresses how the phrase ‘core movement resources’ was chosen because it “has (...) agency attached to it. We not only find resources, but we resource ourselves. (...) it’s a way to actually adjust and refine ourselves to become a more full and whole human being (Altman 2020).” They help in this sense Open Floor teachers unfold dance and movement explorations in, exactly, resourceful manners rather than in ways that ‘push’ dancers and movers out of their above discussed ‘windows of tolerance/presence’. They are therefore also connected to a key awareness regarding how dynamics of, for example, trauma and re-traumatization can occur within embodied explorations (Open Floor International 2017: 130-149, van der Kolk 2014, Levine 2010, Pearce 2020). In this sense, core movement resources help manifest elicitive engagements with individual and collective capacities for healthy homeostasis - peaces - which Koppensteiner, from a poetic perspective, calls to “trust and follow Inner Wisdom (Koppensteiner 2020: 6-7)” - in both others and oneself alike.

### **3.5 A Conclusion: What is Open Floor?**

I have with this, throughout this chapter, painted a founding picture of Open Floor through an intertwined process of inquiry that includes descriptive, reflective, and critical elements. In

terms of the first, I have *described* Open Floor as a conscious dance and movement practice, which implies that it does not teach fixed dance steps or choreographies but works with spontaneous dance and movement processes that emerge within and between the embodied-relational wholes who are present. Furthermore, I have described how the initial founders and founding members of Open Floor International wanted to unfold Open Floor as a dynamic practice, building upon a vast pool of embodied wisdom that, in collaborative ways, can be continuously ‘remixed’ in accordance with the ever-changing focuses and needs of those who engage it. I have therefore also described how Open Floor International is structured according to *dynamic governance*, as well how Open Floor is licensed under *creative commons*. In addition, I have provided a descriptive engagement of a collective form of a current Open Floor shape, describing key elements from the Open Floor curriculum as they currently - as of Spring 2021 - look. It includes *movement as continuums*, *embodied anchors*, *the movement cycle*, *the 4x4 weave of experience*, and *core movement resources*.

When it comes to the second process of inquiry, I have briefly *reflected* upon how Open Floor relates to an embodied peace web as regards its transrational and elicitive potentials. I have in this sense, amongst others, highlighted how Open Floor tends to engage the human endeavor similarly to how I have discussed embodied peaces in this inquiry, understanding it as an ever-transforming dance that constantly unfolds through and between embodied-relational wholes. This embodied-relational reality is moreover seen as a paradoxical web that moves *both* as differentiated ‘parts’ *and* as an undivided whole. This resonance between Open Floor and an embodied approach to peaces can in this sense be traced back to a shared field of influences, which amongst others includes the Human Potential Movement as well as humanistic and transpersonal approaches to psychology. Furthermore, Open Floor is an elicitive rather than a prescriptive practice (Lederach 1995),

which is visible amongst others related to the resource-based focus of Open Floor as well as related to its process-oriented approach to dance and movement.

Lastly, I have started (rather than completed) to engage a *critical* process of inquiry related to how Open Floor - as with most aspects of society - carries both sociocultural strengths as well as sociocultural blind spots/limitations. I have in this sense, amongst others, touched upon how Open Floor cannot be seen apart from a certain sociocultural-historical context, especially connected to how it carries prominent roots within a so-called Californian-based counterculture movement that arose in the 1960's and 70's. It is true in relation to the Esalen Institute, the Human Potential Movement, Gabrielle Roth and the 5Rhythms practice, as well as in relation to the four founders of Open Floor International. Nevertheless, Open Floor is at the same time a so-much-more than this Californian-born practice alone. It is currently practiced and taught in more than 30 different countries by a variety of teachers and dancers/movers who bring unique stories, experiences, focuses, and understandings into the practice and organization. Most of these teachers and dancers/movers are based in so-called 'Western' contexts - including North America, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, as well as/yet also Israel - yet claiming that all these teachers and dancers/movers interpret, facilitate, and/or unfold Open Floor in the same or even similar way would be to do injustice to the multiplicity that they embody. I therefore re-underline how Open Floor is *both* an integrated (shared) *and* a differentiated (unique) dance and movement practice. It might thus have evolved out of a certain sociocultural-historical context that makes it evolve unique focuses, resources, and blind spots. Nonetheless, it also taps into a shared and ancient art that humans have engaged across cultures and times; dance and engaging the body in movement (see Beaman 2018, Pušnik 2010, Ehrenreich 2007). It is with this neither a universal practice that engages all peaces equally fruitfully in all contexts and in all times nor is it, due to these embodied limitations that it evolves, a less valid practice as regards the peaces it engages



well. Furthermore, Open Floor can continuously also transform by changing and unfolding differently anew.

I want in this respect to evolve my reflections one step further, re-emphasizing a point that I have touched upon before. It concerns how there has in many ways been an (un)conscious tendency in conscious dance and movement spaces, including Open Floor, to not always sufficiently integrate dynamics related to, for example, sociocultural blind spots, structural inequalities, 'Western'-centric focuses, inclusion/exclusion, and more. It might be because these dynamics tend to be experienced more prominently by those who traditionally suffer their consequences (see for example hooks 1984) as compared to the more 'privileged' group of people who have often, yet not only, tended to occupy conscious dance and movement spaces. This obviously includes myself, as the white, 'Western', and educated woman who I am. Borovica and I emphasize in this regard how many conscious dance and movement spaces have (un)intentionally remained

a white, Western, educated, able-bodied, neuronormative and upper middle-class arena, failing to sufficiently integrate the lived realities of people of color, indigenous people, differently abled and/or neurodiverse people, people of different socioeconomic classes and people from the Global South (Tjersland and Borovica 2021: 2).

If a practice like Open Floor is to expand its relevance - which, as mentioned, is an outspoken intention of Open Floor International (Open Floor International 2018: 'Solidarity Statement') - I underline how an integration of these above-mentioned dynamics needs to be involved. It is potentially beginning to happen through the current discussions and reflections around social justice, which I have highlighted related to the vision, mission, and core values of Open Floor International. Yet it is, undeniably, still a long road to travel.

To close this third chapter of the research, therefore, I bring attention to a vital quote that I find inspirational. It is written in the context of dance/movement therapy, yet which I find is equally relevant as regards Open Floor and conscious dance and movement. It reads:

self-knowledge about, and intimacy with, the dance/movement psychotherapist's [and, I add, teacher's] own sociocultural identity increases his or her ability to work with clients [and, I add, dancers and movers], colleagues and community members that are from different backgrounds (Chang in Chaiklin and Wengrower 2009: 300).

Building on Kester and Cremin (2017), Borovica and I furthermore underline how such a process of self-reflexivity is equally crucial in relation to a field/practice collectively (Tjersland and Borovica 2021). Borovica and I hence advocate what I have previously, in the overview of research literature, emphasized as second-order reflexivity (Kester and Cremin 2017). It refers, as engaged, to a process where individuals and collectives also reflect upon shared sociocultural limitations, boundaries, and blind spots - as well, I add, potentialities and resources - of a larger practice and/or field. One can with this begin to investigate “ways in which the field reproduces the very [structurally violent] conditions it attempts to mitigate (Kester and Cremin 2017: 1420),” making visible “structural and symbolic violence within, through, and by scholars [as well as, I add, teachers and practitioners] in the field (...) (Kester and Cremin 2017: 1420).” As I now move into the main chapter 4 of the research, I emphasize how I intend to keep such a process of both first and second order reflexivity with me, finding it an essential endeavor to effort as regards a potentially ongoing expansion and transformation of Open Floor as a more inclusive and transformative peace unfolding practice.

# EXPLORE

*I dance*

*noticing the many textures of  
experience  
and the flavors  
that arise  
while I am*

*reaching out, and  
breathing in  
the fullness that  
is*

*seeing  
hearing  
smelling  
touching  
tasting  
moving*

*I intuit what lies  
between, and  
above, around, within, below, without  
I am  
in the midst*

*I dance*

## Chapter 4: Unfolding Embodied Peaces through Open Floor

Having with this provided a theoretical and explanatory foundation of my research, I discuss in this chapter the main research question: *in which ways can Open Floor help unfold embodied peaces?* I do it through engaging the personal experiences that seven Open Floor teachers have shared with me through in-depth, qualitative, and narrative interviews. I hence evolve an embodied venture of exploration that manifests as a multilayered dance of meaning-making concerning how practicing Open Floor has (or has not) unfolded change, transformation, and embodied peaces in seven unique human lives. Following the previously engaged principle of correspondence, I moreover affirm how these seven unique human lives resonate with and reverberate into a larger, shared web called ‘being alive’. It is thus an ongoing integration and differentiation of the personal and the more-than-personal that moves through as an essential guide within this fourth research chapter.

I engage in this context a relational web of multiplicity in this chapter, listening to the experiences that the Open Floor teachers share, how these experiences resonate with me as a researcher and human, as well as how these experiences carry insights for an embodied peace web. It is, however, the experiences that the Open Floor teachers share that center and steer the discussion. This is because it is the Open Floor teachers, through their lived experiences, who create the frames through which meaningful topics, reflections, and discussions can evolve. I start in this regard from the interview encounter with Gunvor, which was also the first interview encounter that took place. Yet, I do not necessarily complete all topics and discussions within this initial engagement but often return to several dynamics in new and alternate manners as they dynamically emerge and re-emerge within the different interview meetings. As such, I unfold a non-linear process of inquiry, honoring and embodying the wisdom of the hermeneutic circle, which concerns how a larger research whole will eventually evolve out of and through a coming together of *and* as a more of what each

interview emerges (Josselson 2011). I therefore trust the hermeneutic process throughout the flow of this chapter, gradually rather than straight-forwardly dancing my way towards new insights and understandings. With it, I move through the thought-inducing interview with Gunvor, the lighthearted and human sharings of Marisu, the reflective experiences of Tamara, the calm and centered expressions of Imraan, the soulful and spirited aliveness of Rivi, the integrated presence of Lori, and the embodied ease of Stefan. I am in this sense taken on an open-ended journey that dances me through a variety of ways that Open Floor can (or cannot) help unfold embodied peaces. More poetically phrased: I am just as much the one being danced as I am myself doing the research dancing.

I emphasize in this respect, before I begin, three vital dynamics. First, my research question centers around in which ways Open Floor *can* help unfold embodied peaces. I am hence actively looking for and attempting to describe peace unfolding potentials in Open Floor rather than only/primarily seeking to (overly) deconstruct the practice and the lived experiences that the Open Floor teachers share in relation to it. Crucially, however, there is a critical lens emerging whenever it comes to vital aspects and dynamics that I argue is key to reflect upon for these peace unfolding potentials to be manifested in an authentically transformative manner.

Second, I am, as underlined, interviewing people who carry Open Floor experiences both in relation to being a dancer/mover and in relation to being a teacher. I therefore integrate these different sides of the Open Floor endeavor into the interview encounters as well as into my following discussion, considering how both dancing/moving and teaching are embodied practices that in different ways can help unfold embodied peace potentials. Third, all the Open Floor teachers who I interview have, as touched upon, practiced and/or taught other dance and movement modalities next to and/or before Open Floor. It is especially true as regards the 5Rhythms practice due to the close historical connection between the two

practices. I thus aim to engage a simultaneous integration and differentiation, discussing how Open Floor can help unfold embodied peaces *both* as part of a larger conscious dance and movement field (including the 5Rhythms practice) *and* as a unique modality that carries specific dynamics and resources. The 5Rhythms/other conscious dance and movement practices and Open Floor are hence comparable and touch similar processes. At the same time, they are qualitatively different and engage distinct potentialities. I therefore hope that when I at times seem to compare Open Floor and, especially, the 5Rhythms practice in the following, it is visible that it is done with, in the words of Lori (from her interview encounter), a “complete bow to what Gabrielle [Roth, the founder of 5Rhythms] created. Because (...) Open Floor would not... be successful if Gabrielle had not done what she did.” It is therefore a humble and grateful acknowledgement of the influence of, particularly, the 5Rhythms onto Open Floor. In this respect, I do not consider that Open Floor and other conscious dance and movement practices are competitors, but mutually enriching dance and movement modalities that can help co-unfold new and further (peace) possibilities.

#### **4.1 Gunvor - Encountering New and Different Learning**

Starting with this with the interview encounter with Gunvor: Gunvor is a friendly, mild, and *jordnær* (grounded, literally translated: ‘close to earth’) Danish Open Floor teacher who is in her mid 50’s and who lives and teaches in Copenhagen. She has been teaching Open Floor since 2017 and is, just like myself, someone who did not facilitate other dance and movement modalities from before but rather moved straight from being ‘only’ a dancer and mover (of Open Floor and other practices) into embracing Open Floor as the modality of teaching. This is important. It is, as mentioned, quite common in Open Floor that many teachers have taught, and still teach, other dance and movement practices next to Open Floor. Being quite a ‘newbie’ myself when I first entered the world of Open Floor teaching, I realize how having another ‘freshwoman’ perspective present feels essential. I do importantly not only want to

tap into the most well-seasoned perspectives from Open Floor but also want to resonate with what is a bit ‘newer’, a bit ‘fresher’, and perhaps ‘not-yet-fully-integrated’.

Gunvor and I did in this context never train as Open Floor teachers together. Rather, Gunvor was part of the first cohort of teachers-in-training while I was part of the second. We have however met in a physical space before, which happened in an Open Floor workshop facilitated by Andrea Juhan (one of the Open Floor founders) in Vienna, Austria, in 2018. I had at this point been living in Austria (Innsbruck) for quite some time, which I did not always find to be an easy situation. I was rather torn between a longing and fear for going home - as my father had been sick for many years - *and* a need and wish to keep living in Austria - as my husband, due to his Pakistani nationality, could not easily obtain the visa that he needed to relocate to Norway. As such, I kept trying to make the best out of my life in Austria while continuously carrying a lingering sensation that I was not where I was supposed to be. I remember in this regard how I, during our shared Viennese workshop experience, was curious about Gunvor because I believed I could recognize her from a picture that I had seen where she was listed as the only Danish Open Floor teacher. There was in this respect a deep part of me that hungered for a meeting, aching for an (re)encounter where my ‘Scandinavianness’ could be resonated with on a deeper level than what I had been used to for a while. During the many dances of the workshop, however, Gunvor and I never truly met. I therefore walked up to her at the end of the last workshop session to make a connection with this Scandinavian colleague of mine. I do not remember what we talked about, yet I remember how this brief, yet significant meeting touched a space within me that deeply knew how I would at one point also need to go home. This move home, however, took me in reality another two years. Our shared ‘scandinavianness’ was in this sense what made Gunvor and I meet. It is also a core reason why I asked her to participate in this research, specifically wanting another Scandinavian perspective to be present.

When Gunvor and I sit down to meet for our interview encounter (which happens via our two screens), Gunvor is wearing a black, white-dotted jacket with a black sweater inside. Her hair is cut short and is blond in a shade that, together with her winter-colored skin, appears almost white in contrast to the shadowy, dark room that she is sitting in. Considering how we are meeting on a Friday evening in the end of January (when daylight in both Norway and Denmark is sparse), as well as how we are meeting in what is one of the strictest and most challenging periods of Covid-19 regulations and social lockdowns during that winter in Denmark and Norway alike, this theme of white, black, and multiple shades in-between seems to fit well. It almost appears as a symbolic manifestation for the continuous movement of life and of peaces; the movement that oscillates between day and night, summer and winter, light and shadow, hope and despair. Interestingly, furthermore, even though the circumstances of cold winterly darkness and social lockdowns are present when Gunvor and I meet, our relational encounter seems to dance us towards the other, 'lighter' side of the field. Our conversation is authentically *hyggelig*, which is a Norwegian and Danish concept and word that describes the experience of feeling relaxed, comfortable, and safe in a down-to-earth and enjoyable place, often in the enriching company of others (see Wiking 2017).

I realize in this respect how Gunvor helps me co-unfold a vital sensation of safe enough, which in turn allows me to how up as a humanly imperfect researcher who can be present with the ups and downs of her winterly and Covid-restricted existence while also meeting the calmness, gentleness, and down to earth informality that Gunvor conveys. Gunvor comes in this regard across as someone who is full of abilities to laugh about her own - in the best sense of the phrase - human imperfections, allowing me to lean upon the empathic and non-judgmental space that emerges between us to help co-evolve meaningful insights and reflections. Aided also by the deep familiarity between our Danish and Norwegian sounds - Norwegian and Danish are, one might say, sister languages and it is



often relatively easy for many Norwegians and Danish to understand each other - I can encounter this first interview meeting with a growing sensation of lightness, calmness, and permission to not have to be perfect involved. Consequently, I can show up as the ‘unfinished and procedural’ (Muñoz 2006: 241) contact boundary at work who I am, who, importantly, currently happens to do research.

#### 4.1.1 The Meeting with a Teacher

When Gunvor and I come out of the embodied meditation exercise that I use to begin our meeting - having visualized our way through different dimensions of embodiment and dynamics of ‘inner-outer’ relationality - I begin the more ‘formal’ interview part by asking Gunvor about the movements in her life that she sees as influential in terms of how and why she came into practicing Open Floor. I try to ask my question in an open manner so that Gunvor can bring the experiences and stories that she finds important to share. I notice, however, how I need to provide some explanatory examples to make my question clear enough. My search for a dynamic balance expresses itself in multiple “eh”, “um” and “...” (pauses) embedded within my words. It hence becomes visible how I am, as Gendlin (1997, 2004) might put it, ‘searching my way towards words that make sense’<sup>57</sup>.

*Hanne: eh, I want to... start with... if you can tell me about how you, eh, came to Open Floor. What it was that made you end up with Open Floor particularly. Um, maybe it was something special that... (...) that happened in life, or special, eh, element with Open Floor that made you think ‘hmmm, this is what I am going to dance.’<sup>58</sup>*

I laugh shortly at the end of my question. Perhaps my slight fumbling is a way for me to communicate to Gunvor how she does not have to give me perfectly finished and well-formulated answers. Rather, I am interested in the imperfect and procedural words that emerges between us as we together make sense in the here and now. Gunvor smiles and nods. I take it as a sign that she has understood my intention and question.

*Gunvor: yes, so when I started to dance then, eh (...) Open Floor did not exist at all. I have danced for 11 years and... I began with 5Rhythms. And... that [5Rhythms] I could only*

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<sup>57</sup> I have furthermore created an overview that helps explain the different ways that I have used to mark diverse verbal and more-than-verbal dynamics - including, for example, pauses, emphasis in speech, gestures, and omissions - in all direct quotes from the interviews. This overview can be found in appendix 4.

<sup>58</sup> *Eh, jeg har lyst til å... starte med... at du kan fortelle meg om hvordan du, eh, kom til Open Floor. Hva som gjorde at du endte opp med akkurat Open Floor. Ehm, kanskje det var noe spesielt som... (...) som skjedde i livet eller spesielt, eh, element ved Open Floor som gjorde at du tenkte ‘hmm, akkurat dette her skal jeg danse.’*

*dance... one, two times a week here in Copenhagen. So I expanded my repetoar with... Movement Medicine<sup>59</sup> also. (...) So I could dance some more (...). Because it was kind of like falling in love. I couldn't get enough.<sup>60</sup>*

Gunvor laughs heartedly. I laugh silently with her not to interrupt the video recording that is focused on her. I can definitely recognize the feeling of falling in love with dancing and moving.

**Gunvor:** *um... and... (...) that I did... for 5 years or something. (...) Danced and danced and... attended (...) a lot of workshops. And it was... really also there that I met Andrea Juhan who was part of... founding Open Floor.<sup>61</sup>*

Gunvor proceeds by explaining to me how she at one point decided to wait for some time before training as a conscious dance and movement teacher - which she had already decided to do - because she wanted to train in this new practice - Open Floor - that Andrea Juhan was about to create with the three other founders of Open Floor International - Kathy Altman, Lori Saltzman, and Vic Cooper. When Gunvor after this speaks the next sentence, I notice how a warm smile is appearing on her face. It is almost as if it shines through how meaningful the meeting with the teacher Andrea Juhan was.

**Gunvor:** *and then I was like this completely not at all in doubt because, eh, Andrea is a teacher who I've worked with the most, next to [another teacher, not in Open Floor]. (...) And I have a lot of trust in her way of wor, Andrea's way of working (...) and that (...) this psychological dimension and the mindful access that she holds to using movement and dance (...). It worked well for me personally. (...) It was... precicly what I needed when I, when I... started it, I think. (...) It was (...) very quickly very full of trust (...) that meeting with her. (...) It was (...) very much based upon such a personal... contact also (...) One could kind of sense this... very competent and credible (...) teacher.<sup>62</sup>*

What I am given out of my opening question is with this a story about a woman - Gunvor - who describes herself as falling in love with dancing and moving and who, out of this love experience, meets a teacher - Andrea Juhan (who also facilitated the workshop in Vienna where Gunvor and I met) - whose “trust”(worthy), “competent,” and “credible” teaching makes Gunvor decide to train as an Open Floor teacher rather than any other form of

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<sup>59</sup> Movement Medicine is another conscious dance and movement practice. See School of Movement Medicine 2008.

<sup>60</sup> *Ja, altså da jeg begyndte å danse da, ehm, fandtes Open (...) Floor slet ikke. Jeg har danset i 11 år og... jeg begyndte med 5 Rytmer. Og... det [--] ko jeg kun danse... en, to gange om, i ugen her i København. Så jeg udvidet mit repertoire med... Movement Medicine også. (...) Så jeg ko danse lit mere (...). Fordi det var ligesom en forelskelse, jeg ko ikke få nok.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ehm... og... (...) det gjorde jeg jo... i... 5 år eller så noget. (...) Danset og danset og... tog (...) masser av workshops. Og det var... egentlig også der jeg mødte Andrea Juhan som er med til at grundlægge Open Floor.*

<sup>62</sup> *Og så var jeg sånn slet ikke i tvivl fordi, eh, Andrea det er en lærer som jeg har arbejdet mest med udover [---]. (...) Og jeg har meget tillid til hendes måde å arb, Andreas måde å arbejde på (...) og det (...) sådan psykologiskhed og mindful tilgang som hun har til å bruge bevægelse og dans i det hele taget. (...) Det fungerer godt for mig personligt. (...) Det var... præcis hvad jeg havde brug for da jeg, da jeg... startet på det, tænker jeg. (...) Det var meget (...) meget hurtig meget tillidsfuldt (...) det mødet med henne. (...) Det var (...) beroet meget på sånn personlig... kontakt også (...) Så ko man ligesom godt fornemme den der... meget kompetente og troværdige (...) lærer.*

conscious dance and movement teacher. I therefore wonder: how might this story about resonating with a teacher carry meaningful reverberations into an embodied peace web?

I start in this regard from an inspirational perspective concerning what the art of being a teacher involves. Palmer describes the teacher as “a mediator between the knower and the known (...) (Palmer 1993: 29),” emphasizing how the before-mentioned dynamics of onto-epistemologies also, as stated, deeply intertwine with ethics (see also Barad 2007, Escobar 2020). He hence underlines how “the images of self and the world that are found at the heart of our knowledge will also be found in the values by which we live our lives (Palmer 1993: 21).” Teachers can in this context help emerge transformative processes of learning where these interconnected dynamics can be made visible and engaged. Teachers, thus, can manifest as a “living link in the epistemological chain (Palmer 1993: 29),” carrying embodied powers to help facilitate processes where individuals and collectives can (re)discover how *what* they (can) know, *how* they (can) know it, and how they (can) *relate* with this knowing co-unfold. As touched upon, therefore, if teachers (and others) help emerge these processes in ways that move beyond only ‘disembodied’ and strictly individual thinking, new embodied-relational possibilities can be ‘(re)highlighted’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 10-13). Austrian peace education researcher Daniela Lehner confirms:

if we learn to perceive, feel and sense ourselves not only as part of the world but as interwoven, entangled and embedded in/with this world, our relationship to the living can change towards more caring modes of being. (...) Approaches that highlight our embodied entanglement and involvement with and in the world, teach us new ways of interacting (Lehner 2022: 48).”

In Open Floor, such a mediating form of teaching would noticeably imply to engage new *embodied-relational* possibilities (Tjersland 2019). It is in this sense an ongoing process of exploration through which dancers and movers can establish new relationships with unfamiliar embodied knowledge - discovering, for example, how there is a valuable process involved in embodied knowing at all - and unfold different embodied relationships with

familiar knowledge anew - discovering, for example, how one can know others and oneself as embodied wholes rather than as (only) 'disembodied' entities. A key potential of Open Floor as regards embodied peaces hence begins to manifest. Open Floor is an *embodied* practice and can thus make *embodied* possibilities become more available.

In relational and elicitive approaches to conflict transformation (Lederach 2005, 2014, Lederach and Lederach 2010, Dietrich 2014, Schirch and Campt 2004, Martínez Guzmán 2005, Curle in Woodhouse and Lederach 2016), a 'mediator' is in this respect understood as someone who helps create spaces where conflicting parties can come into felt and embodied contact with each other and through this find potential ways to (re)establish and transform their relationships. Lederach (2005: 79) calls it the 'web approach' to conflict transformation and maintains how it is within the lived web of relationships - 'the social web' - that constructive change happens. Imagine for a moment that the 'teacher as mediator' metaphor is seen in a similar light. The teacher is someone who helps bring students and curriculum into felt and embodied contact so that they can find ways to (re)establish and transform their relationships into more affirmative manners of engaging.

I begin in this regard to think back at some of my own teacher encounters throughout my life. Is there a meeting that has resonated in a similar 'knowledge-mediating' way? The answer is yes. During the first module of the Open Floor teacher-training program, I remember how we were asked to write a letter (without any pressure to send it) to a teacher who has been significant for us by focusing on what made this teacher become important. I wrote my letter to a teacher who is not related to Open Floor, yet who helped me open a crucial door of embodied transformation in a time of my life where much turbulence was occurring. What was in this sense essential was how this teacher taught his 'meditating art' through a lived and authentic engagement with empathic and embodied presence rather than through a disengaged, 'disembodied', and/or authoritarian 'expert' role:

Dear [teacher],

*You are probably the teacher who has meant the most to me and the one who I have learnt the most about being both a human and a teacher/facilitator from. I remember the first time that I approached you. Slightly (or rather very) bewildered and confused about the many processes that were unfolding, feeling like my life were in some ways crashing down around me and dissolving all the former guiding structures that I used to believe I could live by. In our conversations, however, you never tried to ‘fix’ this chaos that I was living, interpret me, or ‘pull me back together again’. Rather, you listened. You listened with your full embodied presence, offering your empathic resonance out of what I was sharing. You simply were. You held a space where I was welcome to be and, out of this being, slowly begin to become again. I am still grateful for that quality of presence that you showed, the embodiment of attentive listening. Through it, you helped me recreate new possibilities for being, becoming, knowing, and relating. Still today, these new possibilities help me live my embodied dance in more affirmative rather than wholeness-denying manners (from the author’s personal notes)<sup>63</sup>.*

What this teacher managed to do was in this context to help me realize how it was indeed possible for me to be, become, know, and relate in qualitatively different ways than I used to think was available. Through ‘simply’ staying present with my bewilderment and confusion, he helped me understand how I could dance with and as the unknown in my life rather than (always) trying to ‘control’ it. For me, it was essential. It helped me dare an embodied process of slowly finding ways to (re)emerge my wholeness in more paradox-embracing ways. I therefore underline how it is not only an embodied practice, such as Open Floor, in itself that can help unfold new embodied potentialities. Rather, it also depends upon the teacher themselves. Teachers are, in the words of Palmer, the ‘living link who helps make new life-affirming contact between learners and curriculum manifest as more available. In this respect, Koppensteiner emphasizes the notion of ‘teaching as facilitation’, which implies a process of ‘making easier’ and of ‘enabling’ (Koppensteiner 2020: 170).

The word ‘facilitation’ carries, according to Koppensteiner, an elicitive connotation of “relationally working with other people and assisting them in their own explorations” to help enable “new opportunities that enhance and fulfill life (Koppensteiner 2020: 170).” In the

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<sup>63</sup> This text is a condensed and slightly edited (for clarity) version of the original letter that I wrote.

context of transrational peace work, Dietrich underlines how this facilitative approach therefore requires multiple relational qualities to be present with the teacher, including, for example, openness, awareness of self and others, empathy, respect, congruent communication, courage to stand by own position, as well as humility to recognize the limitations of this position (Dietrich 2013: 12). It is hence an intricate art of teaching where the teacher/facilitator needs to guide rather than attempt to ‘control’ a complex and multifaceted space that includes individuals and groups, processes of thinking, feeling, sensing, and intuiting, as well as diverse dynamics of relationality that move from ‘inner’ self-relations through widening circles of ‘outer’ interpersonal and transpersonal relations (Koppensteiner 2020). It is therefore a lived endeavor of teaching/learning where students are invited “to discover, explore, and inhabit those places [that the learning unfolds] in the living of their own lives (Palmer 2007: 190).” This is, I concur, both a blessing and a challenge involved in teaching an embodied practice such as Open Floor.

Moving therefore more explicitly back to what Gunvor is expressing, I realize how there are some crucial questions emerging. Did Andrea Juhan, through her ‘trustworthy’, ‘competent’, and ‘credible’ teaching - which is how Gunvor herself articulates it - manifest a facilitative art of ‘teaching mediation’? Did it resonate with Gunvor in the ways that it did because it allowed her to encounter new relationships as regards the curriculum of the dance, which is embodied life itself? I will importantly not attempt to create any final answers concerning the multiple dynamics involved in Gunvor’s relationship with Andrea Juhan as regards this point. Believing that I could reach such a perfect understanding of another, even when I am listening to her stories, is to violate the very premise that I base this research upon. This is the premise that humans are both differentiated and integrated, unique and shared, and thus simultaneously interconnected and never fully the same.

I can therefore not claim to know any fullness about what was going on with Gunvor in relation to Andrea Juhan. What I *can*, however, is to recognize how this teacher encounter seems to have resonated with Gunvor in significant manners. I can furthermore realize how Gunvor at several points throughout the interview encounter describes how she has transformed and changed through practicing Open Floor, as well as how she now, out of amongst others this Open Floor practice, engages several dynamics in both new and different manners within her life. I can thus potentially and poetically imagine how Gunvor has experienced that new and different relationships to embodied being, becoming, knowing, and relating have been ‘mediated into being’ through and with her Open Floor experiences. Not all this practice has happened with Andrea Juhan as the teacher, yet there are, I confirm, vital insights to learn from how this teacher encounter seems to emerge as such an important one within the ways Gunvor that narrates her ongoing movements towards Open Floor.

#### **4.1.2 Learning and Transforming through Safety/Trust and Novelty/Expansion**

To deeper explore some of these insights that emerge out of this teacher encounter with Andrea Juhan, I emphasize two prominent words that Gunvor often uses in relation to Andrea Juhan’s teaching. They are “trust” (*tillidt*) and “meaning” (*mening*). In my understanding, the combination of these two words points towards a vital two-fold process that needs to be dynamically present for affirmative endeavors of learning and transformation to unfold. It relates to the experience of *both* being grounded in a safe enough space imbued by trust, respect, empathy, and care, *and*, at the same time, being challenged and supported to explore new and further possibilities. As highlighted in the introductory chapter, it was amongst others this two-fold process that helped me manifest ‘enough safety to keep dancing risky explorations into creative territories always again’ when I first entered Open Floor. I underline in this regard how safety and trust are not the only dynamics that need to be involved. Rather, there also needs to be an added dimension of expansion and novelty for it

to become, as Gunvor articulates, *meaningful* as a learning space (Brantmeier and McKenna 2020, Heron 1999, Tjersland 2019, Diamond 2007, Koppensteiner 2020). It can amongst others be tied back to the before mentioned plastic paradox, which, as discussed, highlights how humans can learn and transform throughout the course of their lives yet also form insistent patterns that might need “a roadblock of some kind (...) to help (...) change direction (...) (Doidge 2007: 210).” Helping to evolve this two-fold process as a dynamic balance through and between *both* safety/trust *and* expansion/novelty is therefore essential. As engaged: a core art of embodied peaces is to find ways to offer creative potentials for being ‘out of balance’ and a safe enough frame that makes this ‘out of balance’ available.

I (re)emphasize with this how embodied wholes tend to learn and transform neither through being perfectly safe and unchallenged nor through being fully overwhelmed and unsafe (Porges 2011, 2017, Doidge 2007, Fogel 2009, Siegel 2011). Rather, learning and transformation tend to emerge through an intertwined field of dynamics, which, according to Siegel and Doidge, include processes such as the safety of repetition, the resources of the body in movement, the challenges of novelty, the capacity for attention, the courage to experience dynamics as emotionally significant, as well as more (Siegel 2011: 40, 84, Doidge 2007: 80). It is hence vital that facilitated spaces are both open and bounded, as “these two are not in contradiction. The facilitative space is safe because it is equally open as it is bounded. In a safe container, it becomes possible to explore life’s unpredictability and to take risks without fear of injury and judgment (Koppensteiner 2020: 170).” I add that through engaging boundaries new possibilities can evolve, as creativity relies upon structures to flourish. “Creative adults need structures to funnel their creativity. (...) It is a characteristic of the relationship between freedom and structure that an increase of rules does not necessarily give you less freedom (Johnston 2005: 25).”



I underline in this context some other key dynamics that Gunvor highlights related to Open Floor, yet which move beyond the teaching of Andrea Juhan alone. She talks for example about “*det undersøgende element*” (the element of inquiry), with the Danish verb *å undersøge* literally translating ‘undersearch’. It thus carries an association to going deep(er) because one assumingly goes ‘under’ something to understand it better. Gunvor describes in this regard how dancing and moving have for her unfolded qualitatively differently after she started to practice Open Floor. It is amongst others due to how this so-called ‘inquiring-oriented’ focus has helped her emerge new and different processes as compared to, for example, in the 5 Rhythms practice. She describes in this respect how Open Floor has helped her unfold an added quality of what she calls ‘movement’, which for her is different than the more “clubbing or party like” experience of ‘(just) dance’.

*Gunvor: I would say that... when I started with Open Floor (...) then it was a lot more like it was not only dance, it was movement. And movement for me is something deeper (...) that it in some ways go deeper*<sup>64</sup>.

“Eehh...,” Gunvor lingers on the ‘eh’ sound while she appears to think about what to say next. After a short moment, she continues.

*Gunvor: and that (...) I have never thought about while dancing the 5Rhythms. (...) And (...) it has actually been quite a huge difference because movement has been (...) a lot more for me that element of inquiry [the undersøgende element]. Whereas dance has become a bit like, in my view, (...) it’s not fair to say, but it becomes a bit more like dance (...) It can become a bit...clubbing or party like. (...) And then (...) it’s only fun (Gunvor pauses her words for a moment before she continues). Eh, whereas... when you add that which is called movement then, then it gets another dimension (...) it becomes more like inquiring and experimenting.*<sup>65</sup>

It seems with this that Open Floor has helped Gunvor unfold, exactly, an added “element of inquiry”, which, based upon what she expresses throughout the interview, appears to manifest as an ongoing possibility to expand, deeper understand, and relate with

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<sup>64</sup> Jeg vil si at... da jeg startede på Open Floor (...) da havde det meget mere som om at det vare ikke bare dans, det var bevægelse. Og bevægelse for mig er noget der er dybere (...) på en eller anden måde går dybere.

<sup>65</sup> Og det (...) har jeg aldrig tænkt på da jeg dansede 5 Rytmer. (...) Og (...) det har været faktisk en ret stor forskel, fordi at bevægelse det har været (...) meget for mig det der mere undersøgende element [---]. Hvor dans er blevet sånn, lidt i min optik, (...) det er ikke fair at sige, men det bliver sånn lidt mere dans. Det kan godt blive sådan lidt... klubbing eller partyagtigt. (...) og så (...) er det bare sjov (---). Eh, hvornår man... tilføjer det der hedder bevægelse, så, så får det en anden dimension (...) som bliver mere sånn undersøgende og eksperimenterende.

aspects from new and different perspectives. As Gunvor emphasizes at another point, it seems to be a more poignant capacity for awareness as well as curiosity towards the different ways that both she and others are and can be affected by, as well as choose to relate with, diverse aspects that influence their lives. This awareness and curiosity have in turn, as Gunvor herself phrases it, helped her evolve “some more alternatives from how [she] otherwise might react[s]. (...) A wider space to navigate within... to choose”<sup>66</sup>.

At the same time, when I at another point during the interview ask Gunvor about if she has also lived difficult/challenging experiences in relation to Open Floor and/or experienced limitations to the practice, she brings attention to the ‘other side’ of this novelty/expansion-safety/trust dynamic. She reflects upon how Open Floor is not therapy even if can, as engaged, carry therapeutic potentials. It might therefore be times where dancers and movers need other and/or additional support after, along with, or instead of dancing and moving due to the intensity of lived material that *can* (rather than *must*) come up during embodied explorations. In this context, Gunvor underlines how she has herself at times needed to talk with a therapist after dancing and moving, as well as how she has witnessed other dancers and movers having a seemingly challenging time after certain classes/workshops. She does however not specify whether these classes/workshops relate to Open Floor or to other forms of conscious dance and movement. In this regard, I begin to think about the importance of creating safe enough and thus bounded enough spaces as a teacher/facilitator and therefore ask Gunvor if she has had any experiences in this respect.

*Hanne: eh, I am thinking, (...) because it [what Gunvor has talked about] also has to do with... if it is safe enough... (...) if the facilitator manages to create a safe enough place.*<sup>67</sup>

Gunvor confirms my statement with a short and concise “yes”. I continue.

*Hanne: then I am wondering, if you yourself have experiences of... on the one side of... spaces that have been safe enough? And what was it that made them safe enough? And do*

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<sup>66</sup> (...) nogle flere alternativer til hvordan jeg ellers kan reagere. (...) Et større råderum til å... å vælge (...).

<sup>67</sup> Eh, jeg tenker, (...) fordi det har jo også med... om det er trygt nok... (...) om fasilitatoren klarer å lage et trygt nok sted.

*you have experiences of... spaces that have not been safe enough? And was what it that then made them not safe enough?*<sup>68</sup>

What I receive out of these questions are two stories from Gunvor concerning dance and movement spaces (not Open Floor in these examples) where she experienced that the teachers who facilitated them failed to clearly enough address important dynamics that were happening. They were with this not able to create a common enough understanding and “clear rules” (*klare spilleregler*) for how to be together in that space. This lack of what Gunvor speaks of as to “*italesætte*” (‘to articulate’, literally translated ‘to put in(to) speech/language’) created insecurity and confusion while trust disappeared. In these unclear frames, Gunvor was not able to “go deep” within her dance.

**Gunvor:** *so that is, those are the two things [the two stories that Gunvor shares] that I’ve experienced where I think (...) where I think it has been created confusion or... insecurity as regards being in that room. (...) Then I don’t get (Gunvor begins to laugh in a slight, yet self-empathic manner) so deep (...) into something. Then it only becomes a bit like (she raises her hands and waves them in a manner that communicates something along the lines of ‘frivolity’ and/or ‘lack of depth’) (...) a bit for fun.*<sup>69</sup>

A bit later, moreover, she continues:

**Gunvor:** *so I think that... for me... it is at least something that (...) for me is important, that it gets articulated [italesat] in the beginning of such a... a session. That (...) one kind of gets some clear... rules [klare spilleregler] to follow and that it... gets said, yes addressed, so spoken out loud (...) how we are kind of supposed to be together here (...) what the premises are.*<sup>70</sup>

She pauses.

“This is at least something that helps (...) me feel safe,” she confirms.<sup>71</sup>

I realize with this how Gunvor and I seem to share some important preferences as regards how we want and need the dance and movement spaces that we participate in to

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<sup>68</sup> *Da lurer jeg på, har du selv oplevelser... av... på den ene siden av...rom som har vært trygt nok? Og hva var det som gjorde at de var trygge nok? Og har du oplevelser av... rom som ikke har vært trygge nok? Og hva var det som gjorde at de da ikke var trygge nok?*

<sup>69</sup> *Så det er sånn, det er de to tingene der [---], sånn har oplevet der har været (...) hvor jeg synes det har skabt forvirring eller... utryghed å være i det rum. (...) Så kommer jeg ikke (---) så dybt (...) i noget. Så bliver det bare sånn nogen (---) (...) sånn lidt for sjov.*

<sup>70</sup> *Så jeg tror at... altså for mit vedkommende... så er det hvert fald noget af det som (...) for mig er vigtigt at blive italesat [---] i starten af sånn en... en session. At, at man ligesom får nogen klare... spilleregler [---] og det... bliver sagt, ja italesat, altså sagt højt (...) hvordan vi ligesom er sammen her (...) hvad præmissen er.*

<sup>71</sup> *Det er i hvert fald med til at (...) gøre mig tryk.*

manifest. On the one hand, if the frames of the space become too fussy, insecure, or even unsafe, we can easily disengage from the potential depth of what is occurring, as we do not feel safe enough to risk a potentially vulnerable encounter with the learning material. At the same time, we both appear to appreciate it when these dance and movement spaces allow us to affirmatively (rather than harmfully and/or unhelpfully) enter this ‘depth’ because we both seem to find it meaningful. I begin in this sense to think back at the before discussed ‘spacemoments of resonance’ (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 110). They are, as stated, relational moments in a safe enough space where individuals and collectives feel close enough and in contact enough to see and be seen, hear and be heard, touch and be touched. These resonating spacemoments are moreover crucial as regards how individuals and collectives can dare attune themselves to themselves and each other and with this emerge a dynamic engagement with the ever-transforming flow of their ‘inner-outer’ lives. In this respect: if an essential potential of Open Floor as regards embodied peaces is to unfold new relationships with unfamiliar embodied knowledge and different embodied relationships with familiar knowledge anew, what is the role of this ongoing interplay between safety/trust and novelty/expansion as well as the corresponding ‘spacemoments of resonance’ that this interplay can help unfold? How are this interplay and these resonating spacemoments expressed in Open Floor? To deeper explore these questions, I engage in the following one concrete example for how the dynamic engagement of this interplay appears to have helped Gunvor emerge both new and different manners of being, becoming, knowing, and relating.

#### **4.1.3 Different Dynamics of Community**

Gunvor describes how an experience of community has often been present for her in conscious dance and movement spaces. She mentions words/phrases such as “*fælleskab*” (community), “*løfter hinanden*” (lift each other), “*relation*” (relation), “*alle kan være med*” (everyone can participate/join), and “*møde andre mennesker*” (meet other persons/humans).

Importantly furthermore, she underlines how this community experience unfolds through a two-fold dynamic. It includes *both* a more collective experience of community where she can, to a certain degree, let go of an individual sense of self to, as Ehrenreich puts it, ‘merge with the group’ through a kind of ‘love’ that “serves to knit people together in groups larger than two (Ehrenreich 2007: 14),” *and* a more individual-oriented dimension where she can tap into her equally essential capacities for (self)authenticity and (self)integrity.

Especially the second dynamic of community - the more individual dimension related to (self)authenticity and (self)integrity - seems this respect to have unfolded particularly through the before engaged “*undersøgende element*” (the element of inquiry) in Open Floor. Gunvor articulates how this inquiry-focused dynamic has helped her encounter “a different way of experiencing the community” (*anden måde at opleve fælleskabet på*) because she has, amongst others, deepened her capacities for “listen[ing] to [her]self” (*lytte til [seg] selv*.)” At one point, she furthermore highlights how this dynamic has helped her become more “true to... [her] own movements” (in community settings) and with this unfold further ‘nuances’ and “dimensions (...) into [her] way of (...) dancing and moving.”

**Gunvor:** *I actually think I have started to become more... true to... my own movements (...) than I have been before. (...) I think that (...) in 5Rhythms it has been more like this... group, tribal-ish (...) this very strong community. (...) It has been something different in Open Floor, it has been a lot more like this (...) eh... varied really (...) and nuanced, yes nuanced. (...) So more dimensions have come into my way of (...) dancing and moving.*<sup>72</sup>

Gunvor points with this towards an essential dynamic as regards community experiences. If these experiences are to be life-affirming, they need to involve not only a collective group but also the unique individuals who make up, are part of, and co-manifest this group. Affirmative communities hence dance the personal and the more-than personal through, with, and as each other. From a *yin-yang* perspective of paradox, the individual is,

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<sup>72</sup> *Jeg tror egentlig jeg er begyndt at blive mere... tro ovenfor... mine egne bevægelser, (...) end jeg så har været. (...) Jeg tror at (...) i 5 Rytmer har det været meget sånn... gruppe, tribalagtig (...) det der meget stærke fællesskabet. (...) Det har været noget andet i Open Floor, det har været meget mere sånn (...) eh... varieret egentligt (...) og nuanceret, ja nuanceret. (...) Så det er kommet flere dimensioner ind i min måde å (...) danse og bevæge mig på.*

needs, and becomes the collective; the collective is, needs, and becomes the individual. Brown highlights in this regard an inspirational definition of what she calls ‘true belonging’. It is “the spiritual practice of believing in and belonging to yourself so deeply that you can share your most authentic self with the world and find sacredness in both being part of something and standing alone (...) (Brown 2017: 40).” It is thus an art and practice of nourishing both the shared and the unique without putting the two against each other. Norwegian born US American Quaker sociologist and founding peace research scholar Elise M. Boulding confirms:

every human being needs to bond with others. We need to be part of a community; we need to care for others. (...) At the same time, we need autonomy, our own space - room enough to express our individuality.

A peace culture maintains creative balance among bonding, community closeness, and the need for separate spaces (Boulding 1998: 445).

It seems in this respect that Open Floor has, through amongst others its inquiry-oriented focus, helped Gunvor find ways to explore new and different manners that she can engage this individual-collective balance. It has amongst others happened through an exploration for how she can stay relationally present while simultaneously listen[ing] to [her]self” and being “true to... [her] own movements.” It appears in this sense to be about a sufficiently felt sense of (relational) safety regarding how she can stay present as fully relational without having to let go of herself in harmful and/or unhelpful ways. Rather, she can be a community member while also honoring her individual sense of self. To say it differently, Gunvor seems to be articulating an experience of the before-engaged ‘spacemoments of resonance’; spacemoments in which she can feel *both* safe enough *and* in relation enough to see and be seen, hear and be heard, touch and be touched (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 110).

It is in this context interesting to notice how Gunvor does not only articulate community experiences related to a lived sense of (self)authenticity and (self)integrity.

Rather, she equally enthusiastically speaks about the powerful potentials for transformation that can be embedded in the seemingly ‘opposite’ ability to temporarily let more go of an individual sense of self to surrender into the relational flow of a collective process. She expresses in this respect how she has often experienced a deep sensation of interconnectedness emerging during and after conscious dance and movement sessions. It is a dynamic that does not seem to be unique to Open Floor but appears to be present throughout different conscious dance and movement modalities that she has engaged. In this context, she articulates how a lived sensation of shared commonality can often evolve:

**Gunvor:** *when you have been to workshops... you begin to get a huge network out in the world as well. And that helps to strengthen that... feeling that you are connected, and that we, eh... are not that different even if we live in... Denmark or Norway or... Switzerland or... Australia. It is still that kind of something (...) something that we have in common. And (...) that can be quite a strong experience.*<sup>73</sup>

She moreover explains how her pre-conceived ideas about others can often drastically transform through living and engaging a shared process of embodied exploration together:

**Gunvor:** *One of the things that have changed me [through practicing conscious dance and movement], (...) [is] in the ways that I meet other people (...) That you can walk on to that dance floor, (...), eh, like, like we... probably all have done (...) That part of walking into the room and thinking ‘oh, what am I doing here!?’ (...) And you have this whole inner dialogue about... all the other people that are present in that room (...) (Gunvor smiles warmly). And then... it passes... like... 48 hours [she is here referring to a workshop setting, which often takes place over a weekend] and then you are... in love with so many of them.*<sup>74</sup>

Gunvor shares a big heartfelt laugh before she enthusiastically exclaims: “and you don’t even need language for that. So you don’t even need to talk together for it to happen. That is really... completely fantastic!”<sup>75</sup> I smile. I have also experienced a similar process of having to wave my preconceived thoughts and ideas about others goodbye after having shared powerful moments of dancing and moving together. Gunvor continues.

**Gunvor:** *It is this kind of gradual sensation of safety really... that you build up. (...) That you kind of... like... are allowed to see these people unfold, and you unfold together with them.*

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<sup>73</sup> Når man har været på workshops så... begynder man jo at få et stort netværk ude i verden også. Og det er med til at styrke den der... følelse af at man er forbundet, og at vi, eh... ikke er så forskellige om vi bor i... Danmark eller Norge eller (...) Sveits eller... Australien. Så er det ligesom nogen (...) noget vi har til fælles. Og, (...) det kan være en ret stærk oplevelse.

<sup>74</sup> En af de ting som har ændret mig [---], (...) [er] i den måde som jeg møder andre mennesker på (...) At man kan gå ind på det der dansegulv, (...), eh, som, som vi... sikkert alle sammen hvis man har danset har, har prøvet det der med man går ind i det der rum og tænker ‘oh, hvad laver jeg her!?’ (...) Og man har sånn en hel indre dialog om... alle de andre mennesker som er til stede inde i det der rum (...). Og så... går det... ja... (...) en 48 timer [---] også er man... forelsket i masser af dem!

<sup>75</sup> Og det... behøves man ikke engang et sprog til. Altså, man skal ikke engang tale sammen for å få det sånn. Det er jo... ret fantastisk!”

*And then (...) it just changes completely. It is truly... fantastic to... experience (...) And that process has repeated itself hundreds of times for me.<sup>76</sup>*

I want in this context to take a look at how US American peace researcher Lisa Schirch (2005) engages Victor Witter Turner's (1988) notion of 'liminal spaces'. Liminal spaces are 'betwixt and between' spaces of ritual, which are set apart from everyday life and can thus emerge different conventions and ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating than what is 'normally' engaged. They can in this sense help manifest new embodied possibilities, allowing for an opening, expansion, and twisting of 'usual' norms and ideas. "In the midst of everyday social structures and values that define and limit human relationships, idealized ritualized space allows new values and relationships to form (Schirch 2005: 72)." In my understanding, Gunvor is in many ways articulating such a potential for transformative liminality in her sharing, describing a lived possibility to relate with and encounter others in a new and different manner after having shared embodied and, to a large degree, non-verbal moments of connection together. Furthermore, it is interesting to notice how the dynamic of sufficient (relational) safety once again re-emerges, as Gunvor explicitly expresses how it is, amongst other, about a "gradual sensation of safety" as one is allowed to "see [other] people unfold" *and* oneself "unfold together with them."

Gunvor and I have with this danced our way through a relational conversation in this subchapter where the ongoing process of unfolding new relationships with unfamiliar embodied knowledge and different embodied relationships with familiar knowledge anew has emerged as a founding tread. We have in this sense co-unfolded an interesting discussion that started with what it might imply to be a teacher before it moved to the potentially transformative interplay between safety/trust and novelty/expansion. Finally, it has arrived at an engagement with how community and belonging necessitates both the individually unique

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<sup>76</sup> *Det er jo sånn gradvis tryghed altså, at... at man får bygget op i forhold til det. (...) At man ligesom... sånn... får lov å se de her mennesker folde sig ud, og man folder sig ud sammen med dem. Og så (...) forandres det bare fuldstændig, altså. Det er helt... fantastisk at... opleve (...) Og den proces den har bare gentaget sig hundredvis af gange for mej.*



and the collectively shared. I emphasize in this regard how I have, as stated in the beginning of this fourth research chapter, not necessarily completed all topics and discussions within this initial engagement. Rather, I have opened a door into some vital topics that continuously tend to emerge in new and different ways throughout all of the interview encounters. The two most prominent insights that stand out of this meeting with Gunvor concern in this respect how 1) Open Floor is an *embodied* practice that can thus help unfold *embodied* potentialities, and 2) how an embodied endeavor of peaces tend to emerge through and within an ongoing co-engagement of diverse two-fold processes and dynamic interplays. Particularly, I have explored the interplays between safety/trust-novelty/expansion and individual-collective. As I now move into the next interview encounter with Marisu, I bring the awareness of both these crucial interplays with me.

#### **4.2 Marisu - *Practicing Radical (Self)Belonging***

Marisu is a lively Argentinian Open Floor teacher in the beginning of her 50's who is currently based in Buenos Aires. She has however also spent significant time living and working in Houston, Texas, and she still often travels back and forth between the two cities - at least before the Covid-19 pandemic made it difficult to travel frequently for a while. When we meet, it is from Houston that Marisu is joining. In addition, Marisu is and has been teaching embodied movement (not only Open Floor) in Peru and Mexico next to Argentina. Most of her teaching therefore takes place in Spanish rather than in English.

When I ask Marisu if I can interview her for this research, I have been looking around on the Open Floor International homepage to see how many colleagues are listed as teaching in Central or South America. I have previously heard the name Marisu, yet I am curious to see if there are any further Open Floor teachers who are working in these parts of the world. What I notice, however, is that Marisu is the only Open Floor teacher who is currently - as of 2021 - listed as teaching outside of the US and Canada on the whole American continent

(Open Floor International 2018: 'Find a Teacher'). It therefore seems that I have, through interviewing Marisu, managed to include a perspective from a part of the world that is rather underrepresented within the current collection of Open Floor teachers.

Next to being this only Open Floor teacher who is based in South America - which she has been as a graduated teacher since 2016 - Marisu furthermore explains how she is trained as a psychologist, amongst others through studying psychology at the university. She finished her psychology degree in 1991 and discovered conscious dance and movement about seven years later, in 1998, through the 5Rhythms practice. Many years later, she moreover discovered Open Floor around the time that it was created - in 2013/2014. In terms of teaching, Marisu has in this sense moved her way through first training with Andrea Juhan in 2008 to become a movement therapist based in the 5Rhythms practice (see Juhan 2003) before she trained as a 'regular' Open Floor teacher and a teacher specialized to facilitate what is called *Therapy in Motion*<sup>77</sup>. Psychology and dance have with this been with Marisu throughout huge parts of her life. As she herself writes on the Open Floor International webpage: "psychology and dance are two passions in my life that intertwine without pause since I start studying (Open Floor International 2018: 'Find a Teacher: Marisu')."

At the time of the interview, Marisu additionally works a volunteer working member of Open Floor International in the sub circle called 'Mentor'. This is a circle that is invested in developing and implementing the Open Floor mentorship program, which is offered as a supportive program of guidance for both teachers and teachers-in-training (Open Floor International 2018: 'Educational Program Sub Circles'). I get in this sense the strong

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<sup>77</sup> Therapy in Motion is, as mentioned, a specialized focus in Open Floor that one can only teach if one is additionally trained as a therapist, which Marisu is. With Therapy in Motion, the psychotherapeutic dimensions are specifically highlighted, integrating "relational approaches, attachment theory and practice, trauma work, emotions and cognition into an embodied movement exploration for richer therapeutic outcomes (Open Floor International 2018: 'Open Floor Therapy in Motion'). Facilitators practicing Therapy in Motion thus often work with people one-to-one or in smaller groups to explicitly emphasize therapeutic intensions. This is different from how I, as 'only' a 'regular' Open Floor teacher, work. It is in this context important to notice how Therapy in Motion emerged out of, amongst others, Andrea Juhan's - who is herself a skilled therapist - work with combining therapeutic perspectives and dance/movement (Juhan 2003). See also chapter 3.4.

impression that Marisu is particularly interested in processes that can help people move through diverse dynamics in their lives through offering a supportive and empathic presence that, in elicitive ways (Koppensteiner 2020), help them encounter new and different possibilities as regards the questions that they are experiencing. This is at least how I, on the most basic layer, understand the practice of being a mentor, a teacher, and a therapist alike.

When Marisu and I meet via Zoom, it is the first time that we are encountering each other. We are coming together from two different places in the world - Marisu is in Houston, US; I am in Asker outside of Oslo, Norway - which are seven hours apart from each other in terms of time zones when the interview is taking place. Marisu is therefore speaking with me from her Mid-March Friday morning while I am talking with her from my Mid-March Friday afternoon. It is in this sense fascinating to experience how we can share such a close encounter, which is also the first encounter that we live, while being so far apart both physically and in our experience of which time of the day that it is. Online tools of communication, although also coming with their shadow sides, certainly open up new possibilities for encountering each other across distances in this respect.

Throughout our interview, Marisu is transmitting a lighthearted and energetic aliveness. She is wearing a bright yellow sweater, red-brown and defined glasses, and has allowed her long, blond hair with prominent bangs to hang loose on the sides of her face. Her appearance radiates in this respect an impression of her as being simultaneously down to earth and colorfully alive. Furthermore, she frequently laughs together with what she is speaking, and she often uses her hands in visible manners to express the points that she is sharing. These aspects therefore add to the energetic quality of her presence. In addition, Marisu often leans passionately close to screen whenever she is telling me something that appears to be especially interesting or important as if to underline the added significance of these points. With this, I do as a researcher not need to make a huge effort to help valuable

answers emerge during this interview encounter. The stimulating and enthusiastic responses to my questions rather flow with ease by themselves through what Marisu is sharing. I do however, at times, need to apply my previous knowledge of Spanish to interpret some direct translations from Spanish into English that Marisu is using. Other than that, I can gratefully lean back and take the stance of primarily listening, asking only those very few questions that helps the flow of answers to keep dancing on.

#### **4.2.1 The Quiet Psychologist with Knees that were Organizing her Life**

After having grounded ourselves through a similar guided meditation exercise as I facilitated with Gunvor, Marisu and I initiate our more formal interview talk with a question that is comparable to what I began the interview encounter with Gunvor by - and which I in fact used to start all the interview encounters. It is the question that aims to elicit responses from Marisu concerning movements and happenings in her life that she sees as influential in terms of bringing her towards Open Floor. In Marisu's case, I end up asking her about what might have "called [her] towards" and "really resonated" with her as regards Open Floor, emphasizing how I can understand if her journey might not have been a "linear movement" and how it can therefore have included "other practices" along the way. I highlight with this how Marisu can "feel free to include this... kind of... messy movement," which her dance towards Open Floor might potentially have involved.

*Hanne: So... the first question... I'm gonna ask... is... the same question I ask everyone to begin with. Um... and it's about how you came into... practicing Open Floor.*

I pause for a moment while I am searching my way towards my next formulation. "Uuumm...", I continue.

*Hanne: I know... for many there is, it's not like a linear movement, many have been to other practices... and, so... feel free to include this... kind of... messy movement of how you came [into Open Floor]. (...) And especially in terms of what called you towards this practice, what was it that really resonated with you?*

What I receive out of this question is indeed a story that is humanly 'messy'. I do however understand this 'messiness' in a positive sense, as the alive dynamic of how Marisu

enthusiastically jumps back and forth between diverse aspects that are meaningful and important. I therefore receive her sharing in a lighthearted manner even if the content, at times, also touch lived experiences of pain, shame, and limitations. It is in this sense first and foremost the animated presence of Marisu in the here and now that for me defines the story in the moment it is being told rather than (only) the content that it speaks through words. In the following, I present parts of this story that Marisu expresses. I nevertheless underline how these words and more-than-words that I include are only a small part of the story that is being shared. This is because Marisu energetically moves her hands, fingers, head, eyes, upper body, face muscles, and more, in a continuous, integrated and fluid dance throughout her entire expression; an embodied dance that it is next to impossible to meaningfully re-convey in a written form. I therefore emphasize only a ‘few’ of these movements that Marisu is making, yet I underline how she integrates words and more-than-words in an enthusiastic and animated dance throughout her full articulation.

*Marisu: um.... well, that [my question regarding what brought Marisu towards Open Floor] brings my... kind of my whole story, you know (Marisu smiles warmly before she begins to share). Eh... I have a... very (...) complicated situation with my knees... (...) So, when I... have... 15 years old, they... (she twists her left hand in the air) dislocated you know, the patellar goes (she twists her hand again) out of the, of the knee (she twists her hand for a third time). So... I recover from that, and then, eh... that happens the same... in the other knee. So when we (...) have the two knees we were in a serious problem here. So.*

Marisu nods her head, lifts her eyebrows, and turns her eyes wide open. I have the feeling that she is attempting to underline for me just how much of ‘in a serious problem’ she used to be with her knees.

*(...) So, between my 18 and my 23, more or less, I have five surgeries, I was in a wheelchair, eh... I have the diagnostic of not walking anymore (...) Um... and... there was a time that I couldn't even bend (Marisu bends two fingers on each hand in the air in front of her as if to tell me what she could not do with her legs) my knees, you know, I have to be with the knees straight. Which was very difficult to go any place in that situation. So, I was... always conscious about (...) my body... through the... you know, the illness, the pain... the... well, the limitation actually.*

At this point, Marisu begins to explain how she eventually started recovering after a successful surgery of her knees, and how she after this started to study psychology at the university while she was still in a wheelchair, which she needed after the operation. Marisu

furthermore highlights how she was going to be a “very quiet psychology<sup>78</sup>” due to the painful physical limitations that she was experiencing in relation to her knees. She continues.

**Marisu:** *um... so there in university (...) I recover, I... walk... back again very well, and I was doing all these kind of, um... you know (...) these kind of conscious movements. Very... quiet, very inside, and... I... think (...) I work a lot of the... awareness of my conscious [self-consciousness] there, you know, about my body. (...) Because I couldn't follow (Marisu shakes her head), I couldn't match in anything, I couldn't (she shakes her head again) go to a... regular class, I couldn't... make a yoga class, you know, I was always... (she laughs in a slight manner while rapidly moving her hands back and forth in front of her as if to search for a place to put them) trying to find where I belong. Because I couldn't (she shakes her head again). I have to be very aware of my body... to move. So I can't follow outside... instructions much, because... sometimes that... leads me to... pain situations, you know, because I... need to be very aware of what I can do, really, with my body at that time.*

Marisu pauses, inhales shortly, and then continues her story by gradually dancing her way towards how she first came to encounter conscious dance and movement (through the 5Rhythms practice).

**Marisu:** *so... this woman, well, I found her, she said 'you know what, I think you can... rehab a little more', because... I was (Marisu puts her hands in what appears to be a freeze/stop position in front of her with the palms facing towards me) very, you know... (she begins to move her upper body rigidly from side to side), rigid moving myself. Because I was always with fear of felling [falling]... down. Or, you know, extra care of my knees (she leans forward and toward me in a movement that feels like she is almost coming into the screen). That was the organizer of my life, I have to... take care of my knees, all the time. (...) So... well, I start making... conscious classes. I work like a secretary in a gimnasio [Spanish for fitness center] with one of the... my... partners... studying psychology, and... she trained me, and she said 'you know what, I don't want to give any more classes. So you lead the classes'. So, she trained me, and I started leading... “shame classes” (Marisu makes herself the sign for the quotation marks with her fingers in the air) for people that has... some issues, you know. So, she make me... the lines that I have to take care, and I was... doing [leading the classes]. And I love it! (...) And... well, and I found somebody there that... dance the 5Rhythms. (...). So well, I start dancing the 5Rhythms.*

Marisu pauses only very briefly before she enthusiastically proceeds with her sharing.

**Marisu:** *And that [dancing the 5Rhythms] was a big change to me, because I... at the beginning (Marisu shakes her head) I, I was not... really, I, I feel that that was not for me, you know. Because... it was dangerous, dancing the chaos<sup>79</sup> like that... I danced (she moves both her hands up and places them horizontally in front of her throat as if to show how her head was symbolically cut off from the rest of her body) without moving my head (she starts to move her upper body in a rigid manner), you know. And I realized that I have a lot to recover (she nods her head). Not only in the physical, but also in the, you know, in the expansion, in*

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<sup>78</sup> Marisu tends to use the word ‘psychology’ instead of ‘psychologist’. See also my discussion further down regarding her use of the phrase ‘quiet psychology’.

<sup>79</sup> Chaos is one of the five rhythms that are practiced in the 5Rhythms practice. It contains what can be called the most ‘uncontrolled’, ‘wild’ and ‘free’ movements of the practice, centering around letting go, surrendering, releasing, and loosening up. The body part that is focus upon within this rhythm is the spine, which provides a grounding connection between the head and the feet that allows for, in the words of Gabrielle Roth, a dance that can ‘jerk’, ‘spin’, ‘release’, ‘surrender’, and carry one ‘over the edge’ in a manner that is, crucially, ‘totally grounded’ (Roth 1998a: 38). The ‘dangerous’ aspect that Marisu expresses might therefore be connected to how she at first experienced this ‘wildness’ embedded in chaos as being less controllable than what she was used to due to how she was always very careful in her movements with the pain of her knees. Further down, I engage this point in more depth.

*the being ashamed of my legs, well, there were a lot of tough coming... to me, and I start healing through dance.*

Marisu nods her head and smiles slightly before she continues.

*So then I met, eh... (...) I met Gabrielle [Roth, the founder of 5Rhythms], I make a lot of... intense workshops with her. But my favorite (Marisu puts one hand to her chest in the area of her heart and begins to smile) teachers were... (her smile grows even bigger) Kathy Altman [one of the Open Floor founders. This was before Open Floor was created and Altman was therefore teaching the 5Rhythms at this point], you know, I love Kathy Altman. I connect very deeply with her (...) and every time she post something (...) I start traveling, and I... was thinking about being a Open... Floor teacher, eh, 5Rhythms teacher, but it was... too much, so... (Marisu inhales after a long period of speaking through the same exhale). Then Andrea Juhan [also teaching the 5Rhythms at this point], well..., brings the... therapy in motion for... 5Rhythms, and I... said 'this is my thing'.*

During this last paragraph, I am reminded of how important the encounter with a teacher can be. The loving way that Marisu speaks about Kathy Altman makes me think at how Gunvor expresses the encounter with Andrea Juhan. In the next paragraph, Marisu makes a narrative jump in her sharing, moving her story from the 5Rhythms and into Open Floor rather suddenly. It is in this regard noticeable how Marisu's way of speaking becomes even more enthusiastic when she starts sharing about Open Floor.

**Marisu:** *(...) um... and for me was a big... change getting to Open Floor because (...) immediately I feel a permission when I start dancing in the body. It (Marisu shakes her head and keeps shaking it throughout the next sentences) doesn't have to be anything, it doesn't have to be... any rhythm, it doesn't have to be... any... you know, pre-conception of (...) where I have to go with my body. And... and that's was... a... enormous freedom. (...) I'm telling you and I can (she changes her voice to a higher and even more enthusiastic pitch) feel that first impact after... two hours dancing. I said 'ah (she inhales enthusiastically), what is this!', you know, 'this is'... my... whole body... reacts like this is new (she nods her head in a confirmative manner) (...) It was for me bringing a more... somatic level dance. Eh, allows me to... really find... clues inside of myself to move, you know. And really my dance changed a lot. It becomes more... (she inhales, looks around and moves her hands as if to search for the right word to speak), I don't know, more... expanded, you know... more... juicy! That's the word.*

To end the story, Marisu claps her hands together, smiles, and leans close to the screen as if to tell me that her story is finished for now. I respond by asking a clarifying question to one of the points that I have not fully understood.

The reason I am sharing this rather long and enthusiastic section of Marisu's story concerns in this sense how I want to convey, as best as I can, just how expressive, alive, and dynamic that Marisu appears when she is speaking. The story that she expresses concerning how she, at least in the beginning, used to feel limited by and ashamed of her knees, struggling to move and therefore thinking she would be a "very quiet" psychologist, thus stand in prominent contrast to how she now manifests during the interview encounter. It

moreover stands in visible contrast to how she, in the last paragraph above, enthusiastically explains how she first encountered Open Floor. Even though I can only see Marisu from the waist up during our meeting - due to how it is happening via two screens - the verbal and more-than-verbal movements that I see are by far neither limited nor “quiet”.

Marisu is in this respect, through the ways that she is expressing, manifesting a vital dynamic regarding how she appears to have moved through visible transformations in her life related to the aspects that she shares. She hence embodies a key dynamic of stories and narratives that I have discussed before, which concerns how stories and narratives are not static entities set in stone but ever-transforming processes that can be told and re-told in infinite ways (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, Mehl-Madrona 2005, Kim 2016). Marisu highlights with this that *how* a story is told is equally - and sometimes perhaps even more? - important as the content that the story contains. As previously engaged, stories and narratives can be (re)told in manners that uphold sickness and pain *and* in manners that unfold healing, transformation, and new movements of peaces (Mehl-Madrona 2005). The energetic and spirited way that Marisu shares her story manifests, I affirm, as a story that is told in ways that give space to healing, transformations, and new peaces to evolve.

I am in this context drawn towards exploring one dynamic particularly. It revolves around the visible transformation that Marisu seems to embody regarding how *the way* that she tells her story and *the content* that the story contains seem to, at least in the beginning, manifest on rather different ‘sides’ of a transformative life dance. What has it in this regard been with Marisu’s dance and movement experiences that have helped her move from her previous experiences of feeling rigid and limited in her physical as well as emotional (related to shame) body and into the embodied dance I am now present to observe? This is a dance where she appears alive, spontaneous, and at home through and as herself. I have in this



respect a strong feeling that this question that I ask is key when it comes to peaces. In the following, I inquire into this question by looking at two core dynamics that Marisu expresses.

First, I engage how Marisu mentions that she in the beginning, as a psychology student, used to engage practices that were “very quiet” and “very inside” because she was not able to follow “outside instructions much.” Furthermore, I connect this to how she later describes that she started “healing through dance” when she encountered the 5Rhythms practice. What was it within this 5Rhythms experience - which, as discussed, also share important commonalties with how dancing and moving unfold in Open Floor - that allowed Marisu to emerge this healing process? Second, I engage how Marisu articulates that when she later started to practice Open Floor, she additionally encountered a new sense of “permission” to move in ways that did not “have to be anything”. What was it with this added sense of permission that helped Marisu unfold her healing and transformation even further?

#### **4.2.2 (Dis)AbleD Structures of (Un)Belonging**

To begin with the first aspect highlighted, I re-emphasize how Marisu expresses that she was at one point going to be “a very quiet psychology [psychologist]” due to the difficulties that she was experiencing with her knees. The Spanish word *tranquilo*, which I am assuming that Marisu is directly translating from, can signify the English word ‘quiet’, which Marisu uses, yet also words such as ‘calm’, ‘tranquil’, and similar. Becoming “a quiet psychology”, therefore, might not refer to how Marisu imagined herself becoming a psychologist who uses less sound in her work but might just as well refer to how she, due to the painful limitations and sensation of shame that she was experiencing related to her knees, imagined herself becoming a psychologist who would engage ‘smaller’, ‘calmer’, and ‘more careful’ movements and expressions because it was the only limited range that her knees, as well as her emotional relationship with her knees, would seemingly allow her to do.

I notice in this sense, as stated, how Marisu explicitly articulates that she started “healing through dance” when she encountered the 5Rhythms practice. She expresses how she had before this point engaged “inside” and “quiet” practices that worked on “the awareness of [her] [self]consciousness” as well as “conscious classes” in a “*gimnasio*” (Spanish for ‘fitness center’) to recover from multiple surgeries and her time spent in a wheelchair. It is however in relation to the 5Rhythms that the word healing first appears. 5Rhythms is in this sense (similarly to Open Floor) a practice that does not tell practitioners to move their physical body according to external instructions - even if invitations from teachers to explore new possibilities are usually included. Rather, 5Rhythms (and Open Floor) relies upon the unique dance and movement possibilities of each dancer and mover (Roth 1998ab, Open Floor International 2017, 2018, Tjersland 2019). It is thus an elicitive practice (Lederach 1995), which trusts the inherent resources of the people involved instead of prescribing ‘correct’ ways to move from ‘outside’.

In Marisu’s case, I can in this context imagine how the dynamic of encountering a space where she was welcomed and encouraged to dance and move in accordance with her own movement possibilities rather than from ‘outside’ standards might have been a vital contribution to the healing process that she expresses. She describes herself as someone who used to struggle “follow outside instructions much” and who was always “trying to find where [she] belongs” because she could not “match” with “a regular class”. I recognize in this respect my previous discussion of true belonging (Brown 2017) engaged in relation to Gunvor. I have in this context underlined belonging as a process that requires not only a shared space but also the possibility to show up as authentically oneself within that space. Experiencing, like Marisu, how many spaces did not “match” with her situation must, I can envision, have made such a sensation of true belonging difficult to manifest.

Marisu does in this regard, related to her healing encounter with the 5Rhythms practice, express how she moved from spaces where she “could not match” and into a space where the relational surroundings were able to include her in the dance and movement possibilities that she could unfold. This seems in turn to have helped her gradually expand her movement possibilities, discovering how she could dance and move in manners that were less “quiet” and more expressive than she used to imagine was available. Marisu hints toward this dynamic when she at one point describes how she used to think that the 5Rhythms was “not for [her]” because it was, as mentioned, “dangerous dancing the chaos<sup>80</sup> like that”. Later however, she started “healing through dance” because she was, amongst others, given the space to notice (rather than someone else telling her) that she had “a lot to recover” physically as well as emotionally. Furthermore, she discovered that she *could* “recover”, even if she could not, as Marisu expresses it, “follow outside instructions much”.

As a peace researcher, I am in this context reminded of how huge effects structural dynamics of exclusion, such as for example ableism (intentional or unintentional), can have on processes of belonging. Without implying that belonging is impossible to manifest in such spaces and structures, I maintain it makes them difficult to emerge. I am furthermore convinced that this topic of belonging in relation to ableism (and other dynamics of exclusion) is key. Consider for example how significantly embodied contact boundaries at work are and can be affected by war and violent conflicts. It is amongst others true in relation to physical and/or mental-emotional trauma dynamics that influence in visible and less visible ways (Mitchels 2006). Moreover, many individuals and groups experience physical and/or mental-emotional trauma dynamics in so-called ‘peaceful’ contexts (Badenoch 2017, van der Kolk 2014) while others, in contexts of violence and beyond, are born with physical and/or mental disabilities/struggles as well as neurodivergent dynamics that affect their ways

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<sup>80</sup> See the previous footnote 79 for an explanation of the rhythm called ‘chaos’.

of being, becoming, knowing, and relating. The point of listing these examples is in this sense not to provide an exhaustive list of the ways that one is and can be affected by embodied difference but to argue how this difference and the ways that it is being included/excluded matter. It is especially valid for peace research, considering how this field concerns itself with how embodied contact boundaries at work live, relate, unfold, and transform *together*.

I bring with this attention to how there in many contexts, which I am embedded within and beyond, often tend to exist a rather narrow (un)conscious ‘standard and idea’ regarding what is the ‘right’ way to be, look, and ‘function’ (see Wong 2020, Johnson, D.H 2018, Inckle 2010, Rashed 2019, Holmås 2020, Johnson, R 2018, Selassie 2020). In my understanding, this (un)conscious ‘standard and idea’ is deeply intertwined with the Cartesian-inspired onto-epistemological heritage that I explore - and thus also with the ‘Western’ capitalist system of power and ‘colonial matrix of power’ engaged (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, Escobar 2020, Midgley 2001) - because this onto-epistemological heritage does *not*, I contend, tend to see embodied difference as life-affirming dynamic but rather as an ‘inconvenient’ element that one can learn to ‘manage’ and ‘control’ - and even exploit(!). In this respect, I highlight some of my own lived experience.

In a previous text written together with a colleague from Open Floor and academia (which is also one of the Open Floor teachers I have interviewed for this research), I have reflected upon how the embodied category of ABILITY have moved and felt through my embodied whole within an embodied inquiry. My immediate reflections are worth repeating:

*anger and suffocation on behalf of [others]. As well as on behalf of myself. When people are not ‘able’ and ‘functional’ in terms of how society normally tends to define it. Makes me ask: what is normal anyway? What does it mean to be ‘able’ or ‘functional’? Personal disappointment and anger for how people shy away from psychological ‘dis’abilities, and how people so easily fall outside and get isolated once they are not considered ‘able’ and ‘functional’ enough. Are we as a society not at all trained to deal with and support difficult emotional processes and pain?? (in Tjersland and Borovica 2021: 13. Emphasis in original)*

I bring in this respect special attention to the ‘on behalf of myself’ that I articulate. It refers, amongst others, to an agonizing process of grief where I have grappled with an immensely difficult, long-term, and chaotic process of loss related to my father’s, for a long time, undiagnosed struggle with dementia and his eventual passing<sup>81</sup>. What did amongst others happen during this grieving process was that I at one point began to experience how many of the relational spaces in my life appeared less and less able to include me in the overwhelm, chaos, and intensity of emotions that I was manifesting. With it, I started to experience myself as less and less ‘functional’ and ‘able’ enough to warrant belonging in the places where I sought it. I thus - without claiming that I on a factual level did not belong in this context - *experienced* how I was not emotionally ‘right’ and ‘functional enough’ to belong in spaces where I used to feel that I did. This experience has been one of the most difficult dynamics that I have lived. It therefore created some deep and painful cuts into my abilities to trust myself, others, and life, making me, for some time, manifest as a rather closed, inwards, hopeless, exhausted, uninspired, and fear-driven person.

Lederach and Lederach argue in this respect how processes of belonging are crucial in contexts of peace building. Belonging helps emerge a feeling of purpose that supports social healing and constructive social change because individuals and collectives can, as mentioned, easier tap into their creative powers to unfold new possibilities when they feel that they are safely enough embedded within a relational surrounding. Violence, whether structural or physical, destroys in this sense belonging whereas safe enough and welcoming enough spaces help belonging to be felt (Lederach and Lederach 2010). In line with my personal sharing

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<sup>81</sup> It took around five years of deep suffering before my father, one year before his passing, finally received a diagnosis - Lewy body dementia - that made any form of sense. In difference from the more commonly known form of dementia, Alzheimer’s disease, Lewy body dementia does not first and foremost affect memory (at least not before later stages) but involve diverse cognitive, somatic, psychological, and neural changes - in our case strong anxiety, paranoia, delusions, depression, apathy, and more. It was therefore difficult for my family and I to even think along the lines of dementia, as we were not able to connect these symptoms of father to the more ‘classical’ memory symptoms of dementia. For me, this experience of not knowing combined with seeing how much my father suffered was immensely difficult and disempowering to live. For more information on Lewy body dementia, see NIH National Institute on Aging 2021.

above, I moreover underline how such a sensation of belonging can be challenging to unfold even if intentional dynamics of violence are not involved, for example if one experiences that the relational spaces in one's life are not able to sufficiently include the temporary or more permanent 'non-normative' and 'out of expected' physical, mental and/or emotional difference that one is living. Belonging, hence, is as an active process that needs to be continuously (re)cultivated and (re)emerged both from 'within' and from 'around' (see also Cohen 2022). In this respect, according to the polyvagal theory previously discussed (Porges 2011, 2017), individuals and collectives can, as mentioned, easier engage their more open and relationally attuned social engagement system when they feel that they are safe enough. Considering how humans are inherently relational (see also Siegel 2011, Doidge 2007, Fogel 2009. Lewis et al. 2000, Bråten 2007), this sensation of safe enough is furthermore deeply intertwined with an experience of relational belonging. This is because, as Cohen asserts, "feeling excluded is experienced in much the way physical pain is, (...) activating many of the same neural networks in the brain. Psychologist calls it 'social pain,' saying people are as motivated to alleviate it as they are to slake thirst and find shelter (Cohen 2022: ix)."

When our sense of belonging is threatened (...), we're more likely to feel worse about ourselves, perform below our potential, behave impulsively, see others as hostile, and lash out defensively when provoked. On the other hand, even fleeting experiences of belonging (...) have far-reaching effects. They raise our sense of wellbeing and self-worth, improve our performance, lessen our defensiveness and hostility, increase our tolerance of outsiders, and make us more compassionate (Cohen 2022: ix-x).

The ongoing process of healing that Marisu articulates in relation to 5Rhythms (and later also Open Floor) seems in this regard to have helped her cultivate such an ongoing possibility for 'inner-outer' belonging. It is amongst others visible related to how she at one point articulates how her personal process of healing has also helped her transform 'outer' relations in terms of "repair[ing] relationships," emphasizing how the emotional (co)regulation that has unfolded out of her personal healing process has made her become more "comfortable" with herself and through this better able to approach others from a "more

(...) cooperative” rather than “competitive” stance. She furthermore explicitly links this to the polyvagal theory herself, mentioning the “ventral system”<sup>82</sup> when I ask her about what she means with “repair[ing] relationships”.

*Hanne: And when you talk about... that it [practicing Open Floor/conscious dance and movement] repairs... relations, or that you experienced that it repaired... relationships... eh, what do you mean by that? Or can you say something more about how that happened?*

“Yeah...,” Marisu prolongs the sound of her ‘yeah’ while thinking. “Well...,” she slowly continues. Suddenly however, it seems that her words have arrived. She straightens her upper body and enthusiastically throws herself into another alive and energetic dance of expression.

*Marisu: As I feel more (Marisu smiles while moving both her hands in front of her chest) comfortable with me... with myself, eh, more aware of what is... appropriate for me, you know, what is enough for me. I don't need to be so defended (she quickly moves her hands out and towards the side of the screen), defensive (she repeats her movement)... outside. That was a big thing (she twists both her hands) that I'm... (...) you know.*

Marisu begins to slow down her tempo and speaks the rest of the sharing from an equally energetic yet calmer place. She takes a pause, draws her breath, and continues.

*Um... allows to speak more honest (Marisu opens her hands from her chest and outwards in a gesture that for me communicates openness and receptiveness) Allows to... say ‘well, this is... you know (she repeats her hand gesture)... what's happening... in me, so let's see...’ (she smiles). (...) Not so much in a competitive... thing, more a... cooperative things. (...) Your... ventral system is kind of supporting there (she nods her head lightly). So... yeah, I think it's... it's helping to... also when you are in a body that you feel comfortable, and... you are aware of your... limits and boundaries... it helps relations.*

In relation to my experience of ‘not belonging’ connected to the difficult process of grief that I have emphasized above, I can in this sense recognize a similar process of continuously focusing on (re)creating conditions where I can feel safe enough to (re)manifest as more relationally open and attuned anew. For example, I have for a long time searched towards new and different relational spaces in my life where I can gradually re-experience processes of belonging. Out of this, I have slowly re-unfolded as a more inspired, outwardly interested, open, and creative person. Importantly however, this re-inspired me that is now emerging is by far the same me that first entered the grieving process. Rather, my experiences have changed me. I can for example notice how I am now - perhaps for the first real time in

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<sup>82</sup> With “the ventral system”, Marisu refers to the ventral branch of the polyvagal nerve, which, according to Porges, helps activate the above-mentioned social engagement system (Porges 2011, 2017).

my life - beginning to manifest the sensation of true belonging previously discussed. It encompasses, as mentioned, the “spiritual practice of believing in and belonging to yourself so deeply that you can share your most authentic self with the world and find sacredness in both being part of something and standing alone (...) (Brown 2017: 40)”. I have thus realized how the only way for me to heal after this difficult process of grief is to *both* embrace my personal story of loss and ‘not belonging’ - finding sacredness in standing alone - *and* allow it to be only one part rather than the full picture of who I am - finding simultaneous sacredness in being part of something that is more than this story alone. It therefore involves a transformative practice of telling my story differently now as compared to how I was able to tell it before. In many ways, therefore, I have iterated back to the beginning of this subchapter. I am, in line with Marisu, finding ways to tell my story in manners that allow new healing, transformation, and peaces to emerge.

#### **4.2.3 Intertwined Dynamics of Shame**

To with this continue my discussion of ‘inner-outer’ belonging, I (re)underline how belonging is not only a process that unfolds out of surrounding conditions but also out of ‘inner’ self-relations. It is hence, as emphasized, an ongoing ‘inner-outer’ interplay. I highlight in this respect how Marisu at one point articulates how a more ‘inner’ healing process that she has experienced in relation to the 5Rhythms (and later also Open Floor) has been both physical and emotional. It has thus emerged simultaneously in terms of expanding her physical range of movement *and* in terms of “recover[ing]” from an accompanying sensation of feeling “ashamed of her legs.” The word ‘healing’ is in this sense etymologically connected to the word ‘whole’ (Onions 1966: 432). It thus points towards how healing is an intertwined engagement of wholeness rather than a separation into singular and disconnected ‘parts’ (see also Badenoch 2017, van der Kolk 2014).



Another healing difference that Marisu experienced when she started to practice the 5Rhythms (and later also Open Floor) might therefore be related to how the 5Rhythms (and Open Floor) does indeed not separate the physical from the rest of embodied wholeness. Rather, 5Rhythms (and Open Floor) engages the physical layer as an interconnected entry point that helps elicit the intertwined dance of the whole (Tjersland 2019, Roth 1998ab, Open Floor International 2018, 2017). Marisu might with this, which she also hints at, have experienced healing through the 5Rhythms (and Open Floor) because it helped her engage her physical limitations together with and related to her emotional dynamics of shame. This might in turn, potentially, have made her aware of how she was not only “rigid moving her [physical] body” but also had “a lot to recover” as regards her emotional self-relationship. This is notably a key awareness of interconnectedness that can help unfold healing in and by itself, helping to make visible how diverse dynamics of wholeness continuously co-create.

Brown defines in this respect shame as “*the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging* (Brown 2012: 69. Emphasis in original). She thus connects it to a felt experience of living in a ‘deserved’ state of social disconnection, implying that one, often without being fully aware, believes that something is essentially flawed with oneself and how one does therefore not deserve to be included in a relational surrounding of community and love. Shame emerges with this as the felt sensation of being the fault oneself rather than having done something ‘faulty’ (Gilbert 2009: 237-238, Brown 2012: 71-74). It thus often unfolds together with an (un)conscious belief that there is not much one can do to change one’s situation, as all one can do is to assumingly ‘hide’ the ‘part’ that one is ashamed of from the surroundings and oneself. This makes shame an often challenging, although not impossible, sensation to transform (Brown 2012, Bradshaw 2005), as well as a frequently paralyzing experience to live (van der Kolk 2014). It therefore tends to activate the survival system rather than the more openly oriented

social engagement system (Porges 2011, 2017). This is because shame, through the strenuous effort to hide a prominent ‘part’ of oneself, often prevents one from moving in dynamic manners within the relational processes that one engages. It can because of this also be interconnected with a ‘lack of belonging’, making the before discussed processes of relational attunement and ongoing transformation more difficult to manifest.

Being myself a contact boundary at work who - as many, I believe - have experienced how processes of shame can be forcefully activated and unleashed, I can recognize how shame can be contact-reducing and limiting in this way. When my personal shame responses are elicited, I tend to unfold as strict and self-judgmental me, harshly telling myself how I am unlovable. In this experience, I physically and emotionally contract, clenching my jaw, shoulders, pelvis, and more to embody as little space ‘within’ and ‘around’ as I can. I do this because my shame response tells me how I need to *not* be seen, *not* be heard, *not* be touched, being, assumingly, underserving of the relational resonance that this presence would emerge. Shame, therefore, is an energy that pushes me away from my relational surroundings, and ultimately also from myself. Crucially however, shame is not the only energy that I embody and live. Rather, there is always also this other dance that can compassionately, lovingly, and empathically welcome my shame *and* engage my wholeness at the same time. This dance can therefore unveil a different space where I am simultaneously whole *and* can feel dynamics of shame without having to put the two against each other. In this context: what insights can the similar process of “cleaning” of shame, which Marisu at one point articulates, provide? Is Marisu emphasizing a comparable dance of healing (self)acceptance? Furthermore, how can our shared insights regarding healing and shame help shed light onto ongoing processes of transformation? To deeper explore these questions, I engage Marisu’s experiences with Open Floor specifically - rather than also the 5Rhythms practice - in the following.

#### 4.2.4 Radical Permission, Radical (Self)Acceptance

At one point, Marisu emphasizes how one of the core aspects that has helped her transform dynamics of shame - especially yet not exclusively related to her knees - connects to an added sense of “permission” that she has experienced in Open Floor. She expresses how this sense of permission has been two-fold; a permission to *physically* move in ways that did not “have to be anything” and that did not carry any “pre-conception of where [she] has to go with her body,” and a permission to *emotionally* be “in a broken moment” without having to change it or fix it. She thus points towards a similar process of intertwined healing as previously emphasized in relation to the 5Rhythms practice. This process, however, seems to have deepened and unfolded even further through the added layer of permission that she has experienced in Open Floor.

In terms of the more *physically* oriented dimension of permission, Marisu articulates how she has experienced a key difference between the 5Rhythms and Open Floor. It manifests out of how the 5Rhythms is, according to Marisu, more “energetical” and “sympatic” - which she speaks of in relation to the sympathetic activation of the nervous system, which, briefly summed up, is responsible for preparing the embodied whole for action, for example through activating the survival response of fight/flight (Fogel 2009: 147-152). Open Floor, on the other hand, is more “somatic” and less “cathartic.” The reason Marisu uses these words might be connected to how the 5Rhythms practice moves through a five-fold structure in its classes and workshops - hence the name ‘5Rhythms’. The third part of this process - the rhythm called ‘chaos’ (which Marisu also refers to in her beginning story in this subchapter) - reaches, as mentioned, a physically expressive and cathartic ‘peak’ that can ‘jerk’, ‘spin’, and ‘release’ one ‘over the edge’ into a process of surrender and letting go (Roth 1998a). In Open Floor, this cathartic ‘peak’ is not necessarily involved, yet it *can* be involved if an Open Floor teacher chooses to make it so. This is because the curricular

structure that Open Floor leans upon in many ways emerges as a more open-ended structure that to a greater extent depends upon what an individual teacher chooses to bring. Open Floor is furthermore, as discussed, a practice that more explicitly includes an involvement of therapeutic perspectives and thus tends to focus less upon cathartic release and more upon embodied co-regulation (Open Floor International 2017, Juhan 2003, Badenoch 2017). A ‘peak’ will therefore look different if a teacher chooses to engage it in Open Floor. In this context, Marisu expresses how this shift from a ‘peak’ and into embodied co-regulation have for her helped unfold new and different ways to move that have involved less “hurt” and less “pain” than what she was used to from before.

*Marisu: sometimes [in 5Rhythms]... it was too much. Or sometimes after dancing everything hurts, for example (Marisu expresses her words in a fast-paced and rapid manner that leaves only minimum space for breath in-between her words). And you appreciate that as ‘oh, wow, everything hurt, I danced wonderful. Really?’*

Marisu looks almost accusingly into the camera while speaking her last word, leaning her upper body forward in a way that makes me feel like she is about to enter and move through the screen. It is as if she wants to underline for me just how absurd she finds it that she used to appreciate how everything was hurting after dancing and moving. “Really?” she repeats her question before laughing in a warm manner and leaning her upper body backwards again.

*Marisu: so now in Open Floor, after a dance, I don't have, I don't have pain, for example. That was a big change.*

The physically oriented dimension of “permission” that Marisu speaks about seems with this to have also helped her deepen her manners of moving from a self-unfolded place, eliciting further ways to dance and move in accordance with her physical body without “pushing” it, which is a word that Marisu frequently uses connected to Open Floor. It thus seems to have helped her expand her dance and movement possibilities through being soft towards, taking care of, and empathically relating with herself rather than forcefully ‘thrusting herself’ always forward and forward. I am in this sense reminded of my previous discussion related to Gunvor. Also Gunvor articulates a comparable dynamic of gradual expansion when it comes to Open Floor - especially connected to the “*undersøgende element*” (the element of inquiry). For Marisu, it seems that this expansive dynamic has

manifested through a ‘softer’ and more ‘passive’ process - if passive is understood affirmatively in the sense of ‘not doing/doing less’ - which again makes me think at the key two-fold dynamic involved in learning and transformation also discussed related to Gunvor. It concerns, as mentioned, how individuals and collectives need to *both* be challenged to explore further possibilities *and* grounded in a safe enough space that makes this exploration possible. Put differently, individuals and collectives need to engage an ongoing paradox; to continuously allow themselves and their surroundings to be as they are *and* keep unfolding into further potentialities. To deeper engage this paradox, I underline the more *emotionally* oriented dimension of “permission” that Marisu articulates in relation to Open Floor.

Marisu brings at one point attention to a book that Open Floor International encouraged Marisu’s cohort of teachers-in-training to read during their teacher-training program. It is the book titled *Radical Acceptance. Awakening the Love that Heals Fear and Shame* by US American clinical psychologist and Buddhist meditation teacher Tara Brach (2003). This book seems to have made a huge impression on Marisu. It discusses the practice of radically, and thus also unconditionally, accepting oneself exactly as one *is* within each unique moment whether that is an experience of pleasure or pain, like or dislike, comfort or discomfort. This, in turn, opens up possibilities for transformation and healing (see also Allione 2008). It is in other words an ongoing “cultivation of mindfulness and compassion (Brach 2003: 4)” that helps nourish our healing and transformative capacities to “experience ourselves and our lives as it *is* (Brach 2003: 4. Emphasis added).”

In Marisu’s case, it seems that this practice of radical acceptance has helped her unfold greater capacities for (self)acceptance and (self)love. She voices how it has helped her embrace how she is sometimes “broken” and “vulnerable” and how this is ok. Furthermore, she underlines how she has integrated this ‘vulnerability and brokenness’ as one of her greatest resources as an Open Floor teacher, becoming herself a teacher who focuses on

creating welcoming and safe enough spaces so that dancers and movers can come and move regardless of whether they are “super happy” or “have broken” that day because whatever they are they can always also “move it”. Amongst others, she finds it crucial that the dancers and movers who come to her classes and workshops can learn to “find their own [way]” without always “following some models of how everything has to be” because then “you lost yourself there”. She therefore “loves” to teach Open Floor because it allows her to embody this other message that “you can just come and enjoy what you are” because it is “perfect as you are”. Moreover, through the dance and movement-oriented dimension involved in Open Floor, she can simultaneously embody the intertwined message regarding how whatever and however you are you can always also “move it” - allowing yourself to transform. This simultaneous layer of acceptance and transformation has in this sense, as Marisu articulates it, been what “saves her life”.

One of the stories that particularly strikes me in this context concerns how Marisu voices that she was herself given such a radical permission to be in “a broken moment” and “a vulnerable place” during the Open Floor teacher-training program. At the same time, she was allowed to move this ‘vulnerability and brokenness’ into further possibilities through the process of letting “emotions come”. I re-emphasize in this regard the previously discussed Open Floor value *move & include* (Open Floor International 2017: 4). It underlines, as engaged, how one can take the stance of an empathic witness who unconditionally embraces what *is* and simultaneously engage the intention to transform. It is, I assume, amongst others this ‘move & include’ value that Marisu points towards when she at one point speaks about “keep on moving... keep on moving” while also becoming “a witness of [her]self.”

*Marisu: the first thing (...) I can... tell you is, eh... when I was doing the training [the Open Floor teacher-training program] (...) they [Open Floor International] recommend us (...) to read the book of Tara Brach, ‘Radical Acceptance’. And that... match between the Open Floor training and that book really changed a lot of my... life, you know. I was also in a... very... broken moment. I immigrate to United States (...) and it, the plan didn't work as I expect, you know. So I was pretty in a... unknown field, doing the first training... of Open Floor... eh, and with my broken life.*

Marisu begins to look straight into the camera while she shakes her head lightly and smiles in a (self)empathic manner.

*(...) I was in a very vulnerable place.*

She continues.

*And personally... the permission to be in that training so broken and find my place, you know. Eh, keep on moving... keep on moving, and... let emotions come... but from a little more... no cathartic way, you know what I mean? It was like a more mindfulness... (Marisu moves her hands in circles that keep flowing inwards towards her chest) (...) how you became a... a witness of yourself... (she pauses her words yet continues to move her hands in the same inward circles before she proceeds) and... and well, that brings me, eh, more acceptance of... myself, you know, of... cleaning... yeah, something about being ashamed with me was kind of strong in there. I have to be, you know... not follow any models.*

Marisu nods her head briefly.

*It was like 'okay, this is my story. This is what I love to do. And I can be... appearing as I am'.*

Ditzel Facci (2020) emphasizes in this respect how all embodied processes of transformation rely upon such an ongoing interplay between radical acceptance of what *is* and the intention to transform. She builds amongst others upon Dietrich and Kornfield to contend how the practice of radically “familiarizing ourselves with what we think of as bad, frightening, or threatening holds surprisingly powerful potentials for inner and outer peace (Dietrich 2013: 126).” Simultaneously, “this perspective (...) neither implies making oneself passive to treat or violence, nor ignores the depth of one’s and other people’s suffering (Ditzel Facci 2020: 205 based on Kornfield 2008). Radical acceptance is therefore not a disengaged resignation but a lived acknowledgement of what *is* while also engaging the potential to transform. It is in other words an “*active* training of the heart and mind (Brach 2003: 3. Emphasis added).” Selassie interestingly refers to a comparable aspect when she discusses ‘the paradox of the spiritual path’, maintaining how we (humans) need to “continually deepen our exploration, integrate our understanding, and evolve our capacities while also resting in the freedom and ease of accepting exactly how things are for us right now (Selassie 2020: 202).” According to Selassie, this process of both-and is what it means to ‘be ourselves’ and through this process of ‘being ourselves’, we belong.

I appear with this to have arrived (back) at the ‘inner-outer’ process of belonging that seems to emerge as a guiding thread throughout this interview encounter with Marisu. There is in this sense a crucial interconnectedness between holistic processes of healing, ‘inner-outer’ endeavors of (safe enough) belonging, personal (and collective) transformations of shame, radical (self)acceptance, and lived engagements with societal (and internalized) structures and ideas regarding inclusion/exclusion that seems to manifest as an essential nexus and core within our ongoing discussion. In many ways, therefore, Marisu and I have touched upon similar topics as previously engaged related to Gunvor, particularly connected to the intertwined relationship between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ as well as the simultaneous need to be safe enough/allow things to be as they are *and* transform/engage further possibilities. Marisu and I have however expanded and deepened these topics into new and different realms of exploration connected to the vital topic of belonging. I emphasize in this respect how the discussion that Marisu and I have co-emerged is by far completed but will be deepened and expanded upon as the other Open Floor teachers who I have interviewed add their insights and experiences as regards an embodied peace web. Before that, however, I discuss a final element that Marisu expresses. It is not the main dynamic that she highlights, yet it manifests as crucial and unfolds as interconnected with the topics of belonging and (un)intentional structures of inclusion/exclusion already discussed so far.

#### **4.2.5 All the World Included?**

At one point, I ask Marisu if she has also experienced limits to Open Floor; if there have been elements that are “too much”, “harmful”, or “just unhelpful” in relation to the practice. To answer this question, Marisu pauses her words, looks directly into the camera, and expresses: “well... to be very honest, because you want me to be very honest. Sometimes, eh... is an [US] American training. You know what I mean?” Marisu and I enter with this an enriching conversation regarding how and how not Open Floor manages to be an inclusive practice also



outside and beyond the ‘Western’ and largely English-speaking context out of which it grew and is currently still, for the main part, based.

*Marisu: so, there are... cultural aspects. I was the only (...) Sud Ameri... or... the only speaking Spanish (...) in the [Open Floor teacher-training program]. I'm accustomed to be, you know, out of that, but... sometimes... I feel..., yeah (...) it was a cultural thing... I think. Eh... I have to make a effort to... (...) you know, tune with something.*

Marisu nods her head in a slight yet affirmative manner.

*Or... for example in Argentina we couldn't get... the “last” (Marisu makes herself the sign for the quotation marks with her fingers in the air)... eh, (...) equipment, or... everything is expensive, we can't pay in dollars. There's a lot of adaptations that sometimes, you know, they [Open Floor International] are kind of... not... taken care about.*

Marisu highlights with this a key aspect that I have touched upon before. It concerns how Open Floor, as with all elements of society, carries sociocultural aspects that are colored by certain contexts more than others. It is true even if Open Floor builds upon a shared embodied resource - dance and engaging the body in movement - and even though it underlines inclusion in its values and approaches. Particularly, it is relevant related to an influential historical and present-day connection to the US (especially California) and to how most Open Floor teachers are currently based in so-called ‘Western’ contexts (including North America, Europe, Australia/New Zealand, as well as/yet also Israel). Marisu, as a teacher located in a part of the world that is noticeably underrepresented within the current collection of Open Floor teachers, can in this respect help bring attention to key potential blind spots that exist (see Chang in Chaiklin and Wengrower 2009). I notice in this regard two core aspects in Marisu’s sharing. They are 1) economic imbalances between the so-called Global North and Global South, and 2) the predominant presence of English and/or ‘Western’ cultural references/norms in Open Floor/conscious dance and movement. As a practice and organization, Open Floor might in this sense need to engage these blind spots if they, as Marisu phrases it at another point, “wants (...) all the world... be included.”

Looking in this respect first at the financial dynamics involved, I underline how most Open Floor classes/workshops (still) tend to be thought by self-employed teachers who offer

their classes and workshops for adults who pay money to attend. It is thus (still) not a practice that is widely integrated into different fields and works even if this is an explicit goal of Open Floor International (Open Floor International 2018: 'Our Global Impact'). In this regard, Open Floor International is currently making efforts to provide scholarship opportunities for students who financially struggle to attend Open Floor trainings (including the teacher-training program), as well as for students "who belong to racial, religious, cultural, sexual identity, geographic, and ability groups that have traditionally been underrepresented populations in the field of mindful movement and conscious dance (Open Floor International 2018: 'Open Floor Foundational Programs'.) Several Open Floor teachers have moreover adopted a tiered pricing system to their classes and workshops, allowing dancers and movers to pay in closer accordance with their financial means. Nevertheless, practicing Open Floor and training to become an Open Floor teacher is (still) often a financial privilege (see also Badr 2022). It is not only true as regards contexts of the Global South but also as regards socioeconomic differences within the Global North. I pay for example 200 NOK (around 20€) each time I participate in a two-hour dance and movement class (which I do through the 5Rhythms practice, as there are currently no other Open Floor teachers in Norway). I am fully aware of how not everyone in Norway can afford such an amount on a regular basis.

At the same time, being myself an Open Floor teacher, I am equally aware of how teaching Open Floor is not a profession that it is always easy to financially sustain. On the contrary, after having paid the expenses involved in renting a space, music, insurance, equipment, potential travel expenses, and others, I know how it can be difficult live by. It does of course vary depending on how well-known a teacher is as well as how many dancers and movers come to their classes/workshops yet being for example a new teacher in smaller town can be hard. It is also one of the main reasons why I have paused my teaching for a while, as long as my main occupation has been to be an unfunded PhD student. In this sense,

what I aim to make visible is that the answer to more financial inclusion in Open Floor is not as simple as telling individual teachers to stop taking paid for or lowering the prices of their classes/workshops. Rather, an answer lies in helping Open Floor teachers find alternative funding sources so that 1) they can make a sustainable income on their work, and 2) students can attend classes/workshops regardless of financial means. As I am aware, ideas have been circulating in Open Floor/ conscious dance and movement in relation to this point, yet more effort is needed. It includes not only the effort from individual Open Floor teachers but also, I affirm, from the larger Open Floor/conscious dance and movement field.

Bringing in this respect this aspect of *both* individual *and* collective effort and responsibility into a larger engagement with the cultural ('Western'-centric) and linguistic (English-centric) dynamics of blind spots that Marisu also emphasizes - which, I underline, are intertwined with a larger web of inclusion/exclusion, (dis)privileges, and more that move in a current global world (see for example Mignolo and Walsh 2018) - I (re)emphasize the practice of second-order reflexivity (Kester and Cremin 2017) previously underlined. It is, as mentioned, a practice through which not only individual Open Floor teachers but also Open Floor/conscious dance and movement can collectively reflect upon sociocultural limitations, boundaries, and blind spots. New possibilities for transformation can in this manner emerge through engaging the "ways in which the field reproduces the very conditions it attempts to mitigate (Kester and Cremin 2017: 1420, see also Tjersland and Borovica 2021)." It does not mean to exclude the personal processes of self-reflexivity that also need to evolve but implies to engage the individual and the collective with and through each other. In this context, Open Floor International has importantly *commenced* such a second-order process of reflexivity, yet, as Marisu emphasizes, there are still many aspects to engage.

I want in this context to bring attention to one word especially that Marisu often uses when she speaks about Open Floor International in relation to the points underlined. I bring

attention to this word not to argue how Marisu is using a ‘wrong’ word but to highlight how small and often (un)conscious ways of framing and thinking about an issue can change how one approaches this issue. In this respect, Marisu often uses the word “they” when she refers to Open Floor International related to the cultural/linguistic blind spots that she experiences. She does this while she is herself a volunteer working member of the organization and a member of the field through teaching Open Floor. I begin with this to think about what it means for others and myself that we - voluntarily or involuntarily - are and become members of diverse groups, institutions, nation states, organizations, and more. Further, what do these social memberships that we choose and/or are given imply in terms of taking responsibility for the many ways in which we then also become *implicated* in diverse structures and legacies of inclusion/exclusion and more? These structures and legacies are after all carried forward by ourselves, as individuals and as collectives, through the past, into the present, and towards the future through how we consciously and/or unconsciously live them. In this respect, I emphasize what Rothberg calls the ‘figure of the implicated subject’:

implicated subjects occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; they contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes. An implicated subject is neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in histories and social formations that generate the positions of victims and perpetrator, and yet which in most people do not occupy such clear-cut roles (Rothberg 2019: 1).

What Rothberg highlights concerns in this sense how we, as individuals and collectives, can use the figure of the implicated subject to ‘think through’ when we address complex realities involved in imbalanced power dynamics, cultural blind spots, (dis)privileges, exclusion/inclusion, and more. This is because this figure can help us expand beyond a fixed dichotomy of victim or perpetrator, highlighting the complex terrain of the “vicarious responsibility for things we have not done (Arendt 2003: 157 quoted in Rothberg 2019: 1).” One can in this manner shift the focus from guilt, shame, and powerlessness into social and political responsibility for the structures that we, willingly or unwillingly, embody,

(re)produce, and live (Rothberg 2019, see also Johnson, R 2018). Said differently, the figure of the implicated subject can help us engage the multiple ways that we, as individuals and as collectives, might benefit from and be part of a variety of harmful structures even if we do not agree with these structures, do not intend to be part of them, and/or are ourselves not the direct agents of harm. This can furthermore happen while we suffer from different yet ‘interlocking systems of oppression’ (Combahee River Collective Statement 1977 quoted from Taylor 2017), which black feminists has, as touched upon, originally highlighted related to the relative privilege lived by white women - including myself - even when white women are affected by patriarchy (Crenshaw 1989, hooks 1984, Mohanty 1984). Moreover, implication can take place even when we ourselves suffer from the very same structures that we are implicated in (see also Menakem 2021).

I wonder with this: what changes if Marisu and I, along with the other members of Open Floor/conscious dance and movement, begin to think through our diverse positionings in the world through the figure of the implicated subject? What happens if we allow the complexities that these manifold implications involve to fuel us to act for change rather than defaulting us into self-defense, helplessness, and guilt? In my context, it means daring to reflect upon how I benefit from and live the color of my skin, the name of the country written on my passport, the Norwegian ethnicity that I carry in a nation state that has committed countless crimes against its indigenous Sami population and other minority groups<sup>83</sup>, the relatively able-bodied self that I am born as and that I have continued living within an ableist society, as well as more. At the same time, it means daring to encounter and engage how I relate with, resist, and embody the roles, stereotypes, and limitations imposed on me as a woman, as a young professional (especially in a prominently hierarchical structure such as academia), as a next of kin to people with psychological/neurological illness, and more.

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<sup>83</sup> For a valuable resource (in Norwegian) on this point, see Aas and Vestgården 2014.

The point about listing these diverse ways that I am implicated in and affected by different structures is not to paralyze myself under powerlessness, shame, and guilt. Rather, the point is to recognize how these structures exist and that I live them in a variety of ways. I therefore also carry a simultaneous need, possibility, and responsibility to contribute to their transformation - in Open Floor and beyond. US American writer in sociology and gender studies Allan G. Johnson states: privilege and oppression “is a legacy that we all inherited, and while we’re here, it belongs to us. It is not our fault, but it is up to us to decide what we’re going to pass on to generations to come (Johnson 2017: 12).” I propose in this regard how one small way that I can contribute to transformation is to, with help from the figure of the implicated subject, dare reflect upon and include myself whenever I refer to the ways that Open Floor does and does not manage to authentically include different individuals and groups within the practice and field. As a small, yet effective way to begin, I thus use my conversation with Marisu as an inspiration to practice saying ‘we’ rather than ‘they’ when I talk about the ways in which *we* in Open Floor do not always manage to - in Marisu’s words - have “all the world... be included.”

I am with this aware that the topic I have just emphasized at is a huge topic that cannot easily be completed within a few research paragraphs. It is also not my intention to complete this topic at this point. A process of transforming deeply entrenched patterns of inclusion/exclusion cannot be hastily done through a few written words. I therefore highlight, in line with Rothberg (2019: 19), how individual and collective self-reflexivity is not the only process that is needed yet how it can be a crucial step (see also Tjersland and Borovica 2021). In this manner, we can *commence* rather than *complete* a vital process of change that can hopefully contribute to larger, systemic transformation.

Marisu emphasizes in this respect how such an engagement with inclusion/exclusion in Open Floor needs indeed to be an imperfect rather than an easily completed endeavor. She

furthermore expresses how she finds that this imperfect engagement is beginning to happen in Open floor because we are “open” and “kind of listen” when she, as a volunteer working member - which she, as mentioned, is in the sub circle called ‘Mentor’- efforts to address some of these issues in her working circle. One can in this manner say that we do, at least in Marisu’s experience, manifest a key quality related to what Diamond names a living community (Diamond 2007: 44-49). It is the ability to transform oneself from within through daring to challenge status quo. In my understanding, it is one of the core qualities that an organization/community/field can portray for transformation to be possible. Marisu is in this sense clear when I ask her about if she feels that she is making a difference when she brings her “critic” - which is the word that Marisu uses - in Open Floor. Her answer is, without a hint of hesitation and while continuously nodding her head, “yes. Yes, yes, yes, yes.”

*Marisu: um, of course I feel that there are some gaps that has to, you know... be developed. But (...) as every institution... eh... [we, Open Floor] have (...) like... things that are not... okay (...) And I feel that (...) is a good.... territory (...) to... build together something. So [we] are open... to my critic, when I say something, you know. People... kind of listen.*

Marisu and I have with this, throughout our relational conversation in this subchapter, co-engaged a field that includes intertwined processes of healing, ‘inner-outer’ endeavors of belonging, the transformative quality of unconditional permission, the practice of radical (self)acceptance, lived transformations of shame, and the incomplete engagement with dynamics of inclusion/exclusion, (dis)privilege, and more. What particularly stands out for me concerns in this regard how intertwined the so-called ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ are, as well as how profoundly non-linear these ‘inner-outer’ processes emerge. For example, Marisu and I have engaged how ‘outer’ relational spaces that welcome embodied difference, radical (self)acceptance, and support one to move in accordance with own possibilities rather than from outside standards can help manifest ‘inner’ sensations of healing and peaces. At the same time, these ‘inner’ sensations of healing and peaces can help evolve ‘outer’ spaces of welcoming acceptance and radical belonging anew. Marisu does for example embody this

dynamic herself through how she has become an Open Floor teacher who focuses on welcoming people to dance and move in her classes and workshops regardless of whether they are “super happy” or “have broken” that day. Adding to this the paradox of how healing and transformation manifest out of a simultaneous acceptance of things as they are *and* an inspiration to transform, it moreover starts to emerge as a fundamentally multidimensional dance that can never be fully understood but continuously lived and evolved in imperfect manners within and between embodied-relational wholes. The last topic that I engaged - the topic of (un)intentional exclusions/inclusions in Open Floor (and beyond) - might in this sense benefit from a similar acknowledgement. To transform deeply entrenched dynamics of (dis)privilege, inclusion/exclusion, and more, we need to unfold an imperfect field of relational dances that emerge transformations and peaces in non-linear manners within and between ourselves and each other. To engage this ongoing dance of embodied transformation and peaces in more depth, I move to explore the next interview encounter with Tamara.

### **4.3 Tamara - *Engaging Further (Relational) Potentials***

Tamara is a down-to-earth, playful, and reflective Serbian (Yugoslavian) Open Floor teacher in the beginning of her 40's who currently lives and teaches in Melbourne, Australia. I know her from different occasions from before and this interview is hence the interview where I am the most visibly talking not only with a fellow Open Floor teacher but also with a friend. This unfolds a unique dynamic into our meeting, manifesting for example in how I had already told Tamara beforehand how I wanted to ask her to participate in the research. When she answers ‘yes’ to my official invitation, therefore, I am not as much surprised as I am grateful for her sharing of time and stories as regards Open Floor and an embodied peace web.

During our online interview meeting, Tamara explains how especially her Serbian/Yugoslavian background has been an influential element in her life. It has amongst others given her the experience “of growing up in a war zone, and growing up in a country



that fell apart through a bloody... violent... civil war,” which is true even if Tamara and her family were, as Tamara phrases it, “somehow... safe-ish” in the place where they lived. Moreover, particularly in her current Australian surroundings, Tamara has because of this often found herself to embody an experience that is also different from many of the experiences that she encounters around. It is amongst others due to how she has had to work with and integrate this “trauma [Tamara noticeably hesitates before she chooses to use the word ‘trauma’] ... of growing up in a country that was falling apart,” which much of her Australian surroundings has, for natural reasons, not had to integrate. As I have come to know Tamara from the interview as well as from other contexts, this experience of embodying difference has helped deepen, shape, and guide her practice as a dancer and mover as well as an Open Floor teacher in significant ways.

The first time that Tamara encountered conscious dance and movement was while she was living in Serbia. It happened in 2008/2009 when she was “by chance” invited by a friend to join a 5Rhythms workshop. Some years later, in the end of 2014, she moved to Melbourne, Australia to commence her PhD in Gender, Sexuality, and Education. In this process, she explored young women’s embodiment of gender through a collaborative performance ethnography that was focused on dance and movement as the means of exploration (Borovica 2019). It was also at the beginning of this doctorate that she first encountered Open Floor.

This initial encounter with Open Floor was in this respect once again an encounter that happened “by a chance”. According to Tamara, she “went to a workshop (...) produced by a 5Rhythms teacher” yet it “happened that it was an Open Floor workshop.” In this context, she “immediately resonated with the [Open Floor] practice.” Furthermore, towards the end of the workshop, the teacher announced that there was going to be an Open Floor teacher-training commencing in New Zealand soon. After some back and forth and insecurities involved in whether she should do the teacher-training or not, Tamara began to

realize how “yeah, this is... you know, (...) something in me is resonating with this practice. And wanting... to take it further.” Rather quickly after she began practicing Open Floor as a dancer and mover, therefore, she commenced on the path of becoming an Open Floor teacher. In 2019, she graduated from the Open Floor teacher-training program and has “been... doing that [taking the Open Floor practice further as a teacher] since.”

It is with this important to notice how Tamara and I share another key experience besides being fellow Open Floor teachers. We are both also dance and movement-oriented researchers who, in different places and through different research disciplines, explore and write about embodiment in an academic setting. This is a setting that we can both at times experience as rather ‘disembodied’, not always recognizing, validating, and supporting embodied focuses. Tamara and I share in this manner a vital experience of being challenged and frustrated as well as inspired and fueled to work for change, as we engage embodied ways of knowing, being, becoming, and relating in an environment that - in the humorous and slightly exaggerated yet descriptive words of Tamara - sometimes, it seems, prefers to relate to us as noting more but “walking... brains”. This shared experience of engaging embodiment within a sometimes ‘disembodied’ setting is in this respect a topic that Tamara and I have co-reflected upon on numerous occasions since we first met.

The first time that I encountered Tamara was in 2018, which was during the second module of our Open Floor teacher-training program. I remember in this context how I cherished having Tamara present because I did, and still do, appreciate her as a person, yet also because I was grateful for getting to know another teacher-in-training who I sensed could understand my experience a bit closer. In addition to being fellow academics, Tamara and I were also some of the youngest teachers-in-training who were there. Tamara was in her late 30’s, I was in my late 20’s. I can in this respect recognize how Tamara’s presence helped me feel safer, more confident, and more at home as a younger person in the teacher-training

program. I believe it happened because I could, through the connection with Tamara, realize how I was not the only trainee who had ‘simply’ lived less years of life experience compared to most of my other teacher-training colleagues who were mainly in their later 40’s and 50’s.

I remember in this context how I, as a teacher-in-training, was at one point (at the beginning of the first training module, when Tamara was *not* present because she, as mentioned, did her first module in New Zealand) asked to do an exercise with my fellows trainees where I was invited to ‘take my professional hat off and put my student hat on’. It referred to how I was invited to open myself up for new learning by temporarily letting go of the expert knowledge that I had, assumingly, collected during my many years of life experience. I vividly recall how I in that moment began to think how I had never really taken my student hat off at all. I had just recently finished my master studies and was still in the process of applying for a doctorate program. I therefore did not feel like an expert at all, remembering how that sensation made me feel quite alone and vulnerable in that room full of people that were older and, it seemed, more experienced. As I watched my fellow trainees embrace an exercise that I sensed as more or less irrelevant for myself, a deep part of me therefore longed for my younger experience to be equally acknowledged, included, and seen. Without causing any damaging effects on my Open Floor teacher-training path, I recognize how sharing several conversations with Tamara at later point helped me grow confidence in relation to it. These conversations helped me realize how my younger experience was, and still is, also a possibility and resource within the field of teaching Open Floor.

Tamara and I have after this continued to meet each other several times. These meetings have happened via Zoom or Skype due to the physical distance between Europe and Australia, yet they have always felt rewarding and connected. When we log on to meet each other for this Zoom interview in the end of February 2021, we are also in the middle of a shared online process where we are co-writing an academic article. This article concerns

dynamics of diversity and inclusion in Open Floor/conscious dance and movement (Tjersland and Borovica 2021), which - as will become clear during my following discussion - are core topics that move in alive manners within us both.

Tamara and I are because of this also prominently familiar with meeting each other via Zoom when the interview is taking place. We nevertheless realize how this interview will look different as compared to the meetings that we are having as co-writing colleagues and friends. I guess in this sense that the previous 'hat exercise' that I described from my first Open Floor training module has been useful. As Tamara and I temporarily 'shift our hats' - moving from being co-writing colleagues and friends and into being a researcher and an Open Floor teacher who shares her dancing and moving stories - I recognize how we are able to embrace this temporary 'hat change' that we are doing.

One of the most interesting points to notice as regards the interview situation itself - besides how Tamara and I are familiar with each other and with Zoom when the interview is taking place - concerns how Tamara is sitting on a huge exercise ball rather than a chair throughout our conversation. I cannot see this exercise ball, yet I know it is there due to how Tamara has told me about it in previous Zoom calls. What I *can* see, however, is that Tamara, in small and light yet noticeable manners is bouncing up and down as well as back and forth throughout the full course of our meeting. It is particularly visible in the moments when she is moving her body in one way or another. This bouncing effect of the exercise ball manifests an added layer of dynamism to how Tamara appears. It unfolds as a playful undertone and invitation to enjoy, relax, and laugh, which is a dynamic that is also present within our interview conversation at large. For example, Tamara often shares a heartfelt laughter with me whenever she talks about her experiences, whether they are full of frustrations or full of inspirational moments. The tone of our meeting emerges with this as light, even if Tamara also touches upon difficult topics within her sharing.

During our conversation, Tamara is wearing a light-grey hoodie with a white and grey-striped t-shirt underneath. She has put her hair up in ponytail to the left side of her head in what appears more as a practical manner of getting her hair away from her eyes rather than an attempt to look a certain way. Furthermore, she speaks calmly and clearly, often giving herself the time to pause and ‘look for’ (Gendlin 1997) - she even visibly looks either up or to the side when she does this - words that make sense before she speaks. I can in this context notice how I am genuinely enjoying this relaxed atmosphere that is emerging. I slow down and relax as a response, giving myself the time to search for different ways to ask my questions as well. My interview with Tamara hence appears as a notably reflected, together ‘trying our way’ (Gendlin 1997, 2004) towards words can that unfold new insights and understandings. I guess in this regard that this quality of our meeting is not all too surprising. Tamara and I are after all two academics who are meeting in an academic setting of research.

#### **4.3.1 Holistic Possibilities**

Some of the most interesting dynamics that stand out through what Tamara is sharing happen already in her response to my initial question during the interview encounter. It is the question that emerges after our beginning guided meditation exercise and that therefore - similarly to how I commenced the interview encounters with Gunvor and Marisu - revolves around how Tamara “came into... practicing Open Floor.” After having made it clear to her that “I’m aware that... for many it’s not (...) like a... linear movement towards Open Floor, it involves a lot of other... practices or things,” I receive a two-fold story from the side of Tamara. The first part of this story centers around her initial encounter with the 5Rhythms practice, while the second part centers around her initial encounter with Open Floor. In the following, I mainly focus upon the Open Floor section of this story, yet I briefly begin from what she expresses related to the 5Rhythms. This is because this first meeting with conscious

dance and movement, which Tamara lived through the 5Rhythms practice, provides an enriching ground from where I can unfold my discussion out of.

Tamara expresses how her first 5Rhythms experience manifested as an open and permissive process where she could be and express all what was alive and moving within her. It hence manifested as a multidimensional space where she could engage her embodied experience in holistic rather than one-dimensional manners:

*“[I] loved it [the first experience with 5Rhythms],” Tamara explains in a calm and centered voice, “loved that... time... eh... in a held container... to be... with whatever... was... alive in my body.”* She looks up as if to ‘search for’ the next words to speak, starting to move her head dynamically from side to side in what almost appears as a fluid extension of the movements of the exercise ball that she is sitting on. *“I love the creative permission... to express and to play,”* she softly confirms.

A bit further on, Tamara continues.

***Tamara:** and it was really rewarding in so many ways. Like, just time to be and feel whatever was alive in my body, and then let it move and express.*

She looks up.

*Eh...* (Tamara pauses her words while she seems to think about her next formulation. Once the formulation has arrived, she continues) *time to be in a group of practitioners or people who are... in a similar way curious about the body, curious about embodied living... about, you know, different (...) dimensions of embodiment.*

She quickly adds:

*We didn't really use that language then [the language of the Open Floor curriculum, which talks about four different dimensions of embodiment], but, you know, we did speak about physical body and emotions and thoughts and soulfulness [which are the four embodied dimensions that Open Floor engages].*

Tamara touches with this upon a key and foundational dimension of conscious dance and movement practices that I have argued before. It concerns how conscious dance and movement, including the 5Rhythms and Open Floor, are *embodied* practices and how they can therefore unfold *embodied* potentialities. I have in this respect - especially related to the ‘teacher as mediator’ metaphor discussed related to Gunvor - affirmed how this dynamic of embodiment can help manifest expanded processes of learning, which include and engage embodied ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating that move beyond a

‘disembodied’ and Cartesian-inspired idea about separate ‘minds’ and (less valuable) ‘bodies’. They thus nourish a wider and more multifaceted web as regards how individuals and collectives can co-engage themselves and their surroundings. It happens, amongst others, because interconnections between ontological, epistemological, and ethical dynamics are made visible through an experiential endeavor of learning that approaches life from a wholeness-oriented stance (Parker 1993, Lehner 2022). In relation to processes of knowing in peace research, Koppensteiner affirms how this holistic learning endeavor “includes all the means through which we are humanly capable of perceiving (Koppensteiner 2020: 91).”

In Open Floor, this embodied process of learning is in this sense included amongst others through engaging four integrated and dynamic dimensions of embodiment - physical body, emotional body, embodied mind, and embodied soul (see also chapter 3.3.2). They are, as engaged, in a *yin-yang* manner of paradox understood to be simultaneously unique expressions of the whole *and* the whole undivided (Open Floor International 2017: 14-17, Tjersland 2019: 304-305). Tamara underlines in this respect how a similar multiplicity of embodiment was for her present during her first 5Rhythms experience. It is visible in how she uses “different dimensions of embodiment” as well as “physical body and emotions and thoughts and soulfulness” to describe this first 5Rhythms encounter even if she, as Tamara voices it, “didn’t use that [Open Floor] language then”. She thus highlights how the 5Rhythms practice could for her unfold as a holistic rather than an atomistic practice, helping her engage, express, and unfold a multifaceted realm of embodied potentialities.

In relation to Marisu, I have in this context emphasized how there in many societies and contexts, which I am embedded within and beyond, tend to exist a rather narrow and (un)conscious ‘standard and idea’ regarding what the process of being human ‘should’ and ‘should not’ include. This ‘standard and idea’ is, I propose, rather violently one-dimensional when seen from the perspective of embodied wholeness, as the limited options for being,

becoming, knowing, and relating that this ‘standard and idea’ emerges can often unfold both ‘inner’ processes of self-judgment and shame (Brown 2012, 2017) as well as ‘outer’ processes of exclusion through ableism or others (Wong 2020, Johnson, D.H 2018). It is nonetheless a ‘standard and idea’ that can be stubbornly influential in many current settings (Midgley 2001, Palmer 1993, Lakoff and Johnson 1999, Shepherd 2017). In this respect, I (re)underline how this ‘standard and idea’ is intertwined *both* with a ‘disembodied’ tendency to separate embodied-relational wholes into distinct and separate ‘parts’ *and* with a ‘disembodied’ tendency to limit relational processes into individual-only enterprises that do not interconnect with the surroundings. It is in other words a limited ‘standard and idea’ that affects both ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ realms of being human, manifesting as a ‘disembodied’ and individual-only conceptualization of what embodied existence is and can become.

In terms of how Tamara is expressing her first encounter with the 5Rhythms practice, I notice how at least one dynamic of this above-mentioned ‘standard and idea’ is challenged. It concerns how Tamara’s embodied dance is not conceived as two separated ‘body and mind parts’ but as an intertwined process of wholeness, which, in Tamara’s words, includes “physical body and emotions and thoughts and soulfulness.” Seeing as the 5Rhythms is an *embodied* practice, I do not consider this embodied possibility to be all too surprising. Embodied potentialities are, as engaged, a core potential that is embedded within conscious dance and movement practices, including 5Rhythms and Open Floor. It seems in this context that Tamara’s initial 5Rhythms experience could for her manifest as such a space where her embodied wholeness could be actively invited rather than denied and/or devalued.

Curiously nevertheless, Tamara explains how this holistic possibility that emerged in the 5Rhythms was not a fully new dynamic in her life. She rather affirms how she had always been “prone to movement practices” and how she had therefore been curious about embodied perspectives from before. A key dynamic of her first 5Rhythms experience, which according



to Tamara was a workshop that lasted over several days, was in this respect how it “felt different”. This difference seems to have manifested out of, amongst others, how it was not only a process through which Tamara could explore and express embodied wholeness. It was also a “held container” where she could engage “dancing for (...) for days” together with other “practitioners or people who are... in a similar way curious about the body, curious about embodied living.” In this context, I move to explore the second part of the story that Tamara expresses, which, as mentioned, center around her first encounter with Open Floor. This I do through engaging the notion of *facilitated relationality* in more depth.

#### 4.3.2 Facilitated Relationality

Tamara expresses in this regard a key dynamic that she remembers from her first Open Floor experience:

*Tamara: and one of the first things, I really remember it clearly. This idea that... you don't just drop into your body and disconnect from everyone in the room and the rest of the world by, you know, searching for some truth in your body.*

Tamara speaks her last sentence with a touch of irony embedded in her voice. It is as if she wants to underline just how impossible she considers the project of finding ‘a truth’ about oneself and life by looking exclusively ‘inwards’ and not also ‘outwards’. She continues.

*Tamara: but [in Open Floor] you're actually... connecting with your body and connecting with yourself and connecting with other people on the dance floor and connecting with teacher and teachers... and looking for ways... to make... whatever was the topic, like, useful... for your... everyday life.*

I later also ask Tamara if this “idea” that she mentions was different from what she experienced in the 5Rhythms. As a response, she highlights how relationality was in Open Floor “facilitated”, which was for her qualitatively different than in the 5Rhythms practice.

*Hanne: Eh... what you'd... say about the... (...) that you are [in Open Floor]... connecting to yourself, you're connecting to... the teacher, to the room, to the globe, to everything. Was that different than what you experienced in 5Rhythms... when you came to the Open Floor workshop? (...) Was it like a new dimension added or... was it also something that you experienced in 5Rhythms?*

I notice how I am immensely interested to hear what Tamara will answer. It is one of the core aspects that I have reflected upon connected to my own dance and movement practice. I therefore look curiously at Tamara who is sitting dynamically on her exercise ball at the other side of the screen. I hope that the curiosity of my look will tell her that I am done asking my question and that I am ready to hear her responses and reflections. Tamara expresses:

*Tamara: um... I wouldn't say that I've experienced it so much in 5Rhythms. Yes, of course, sometimes, especially (...) at the end of a good workshop, you go into that space of just... really... feeling everyone in the room and feeling connected (...) [But] in... my experience of... [the 5Rhythms] (...) it [relationality] was more like the outcome... and wasn't necessarily... facilitated (...).*

Tamara draws a short breath before proceeding.

*Tamara: and somehow, eh... in Open Floor it was... facilitated (Tamara puts extra emphasis on the word 'facilitated') Like the relationality... was facilitated. Learning from each other (...), mirroring each other, helping each other expand movement vocabularies, helping each other embody... different... core movement resources. Um...*

Tamara lingers with the sound 'um' while thinking. Then, she speaks her next sentence with added clarity and weight. "I felt that was... the gift... of the practice," she calmly states.

I realize with this how I need to reflect upon my own Open Floor experience for a moment. What Tamara is sharing resonates, as touched upon, with how I have myself gradually learnt to unfold differently after I started to practice Open Floor. I remember in this regard how I in the beginning, before I encountered Open Floor, used to dance my 5Rhythms sessions (almost) always alone even if I was present in a relational space with other dancers and movers. The connection that I emerged was in this sense primarily directed towards myself and my 'inner' landscape of wholeness. This was a crucial connection to (re)emerge, considering how I sorely needed this 'inner' self-relationship. Nonetheless, after I started to practice Open Floor, I was additionally challenged and invited - *facilitated* - to realize how I could at the same time extend this connection 'outwards' and towards my relational surroundings without letting go of my 'inner' self-connection. Open Floor hence showed me how I could simultaneously co-exist as 'inner' and 'outer' - on the dance floor and beyond.

I have in this context emphasized - especially related Gunvor yet also in connection to Marisu - how facilitation implies endeavors that are at the same time bounded and open and that out of this interplay unfolds a dynamic learning space that can allow one to be what one *is* and support, guide, and 'make it easier' (Koppensteiner 2020: 170) for one to also become different. Facilitation involves in other words a process that *both* nourishes safe enough and

dynamics of radical (self)acceptance (Brach 2003) *and* that challenges one to explore new and further possibilities. I understand in this respect the “relationality [that] was... facilitated,” which Tamara highlights related to Open Floor, to involve such a process of learning where she could be guided and supported to explore an expanded realm of potentials through a space that was simultaneously open and bounded enough and thus also safe enough *and* challenging. In this manner, she could begin to transform the second dynamic involved in the narrow ‘standard and idea’ emphasized above; the dynamic that relates to how humans are assumed as ‘individuals-only’ and thus as largely disconnected from their relational surroundings. In other words, Tamara could explore new and different ways to emerge her embodied dance in manners that were not only actively holistic but also actively relational.

#### **4.3.3 On Not Having to Choose between Being Authentic and Being with People**

To further explore this aspect of facilitated relationality, I re-underline how Tamara uses a lot of “and” to describe a multiplicity of co-existing relationality that she experienced were present in her first Open Floor experience above. She phrases, as mentioned, how “you’re (...) connecting with your body and connecting with yourself and connecting with other people (...) and connecting with teacher and teachers... and looking for ways... to make... whatever was the topic, like, useful... for your... everyday life.” In this context, I ask her about “what it did to [her], the fact that it [relationality] was facilitated [in Open Floor]?” As an answer, she begins to explain how this facilitated relationality helped her, first, to realize some of her own ‘inner’ dynamics related to how she often “crave[s] solitude” on the dance floor and in her free time as a balancing move to a working reality where she is “really social.” She hence emphasizes a dynamic of self-connection and self-care connected to a vital sense of balance - homeostasis - in her life. At the same time, she underlines how the “relationality [that] was... facilitated” in Open Floor also helped her unfold another key step. It supported her to practice ways to manifest new and different ways to engage her embodied-

relational process in manners where she does not “have to choose between (...) being... authentic and being with people.” Rather, she can emerge authentic connection with others even when she, as Tamara voices it, “don’t feel like a connection.”

*Tamara: eh (...) something with it being facilitated, first of all made me realize... how easily I close and how introverted I can be. And... when I... overstep my boundaries of how much... I actually can't be with people at ease.*

Tamara continues her story by telling me about how she in her free time and on the dance floor often “crave[s] solitude” because her “work is with people” and how she therefore needs a balancing experience of being more alone when she is not working. Then, she adds:

*But it [‘the relationality [that] was... facilitated’ in Open Floor] also helped me realize (...) the difference between craving solitude and staying in solitude because I'm so used to crave solitude.*

She draws her breath.

*And so there was something in it being facilitated where I could... move through my... preferences and break through, I guess, my patterns.*

Some sentences further down, Tamara continues.

*Tamara: I think one of the... benefits for me [with ‘the relationality [that] was... facilitated’] is (...) learning how to connect when I don't feel like a connection. But still be authentic. (...) Like ‘oh, today I feel..., don't know, low energy or... closed up or not really wanting to be seen’. And then still... showing up with that and seeing ‘ah! (...) this is a new... movement vocabulary for me, or... this is a new possibility... for being on the dance floor where I... don't have to choose between’...*

Tamara looks up while thinking.

*Um... yeah, I don't even know what I was choosing. I guess between... being... authentic and being with people.*

I want in this regard to highlight especially the last aspect that Tamara expresses, which relates the process of not having “to choose between (...) being... authentic and being with people.” This process does in my understanding deeply interconnect with the before-engaged paradox involved in embodied existence, which concerns how the art of embodied living is never only a process of turning ‘inwards’ to (re)connect with a holistic and integrated sense of self - although this ‘inner’ (re)connection is vital - but also a process of turning ‘outwards’ to (re)connect with a holistic and integrated sense of relationality. This is because embodiment and relationality are, as affirmed, but two sides of the same coin. Fogel

confirms: “embodied self-awareness is fundamental to survival [and, I add, thriving, unfolding, and peaces] (Fogel 2009: 2).” At the same time, “our growth of the ability to clearly distinguish the self (...) depends upon our developmental history of self-awareness in relationships (Fogel 2009: 21).” The paradox is in this manner how an embodied process of self and an embodied process of relationality *both* interdepend and co-unfold *and* are and become the same. In line with the *yin-yang* principle, an embodied sense of self is also an embodied sense of relationality; an embodied sense of relationality is also an embodied sense of self. The art and practice of embodied peaces thus manifests as the continuous engagement of this ‘inner-outer’ paradox of life; the constant affirmation of our “interdependent co-arising (Hanh 2017: 20).”

Embodied relationality involves with this *both* an ongoing capacity to being changed by one’s relational surroundings *and* an ongoing capacity to maintain a more coherent and ‘individual’ sense of self (Siegel 2011, Badenoch 2017, Fogel 2009, van der Kolk 2014). Ditzel Facci contends: “self-preservation without change lead to stagnation, and openness to change without a sense of self-preservation may lead to extinction (Ditzel Facci 2020: 203).” Similarities can in this manner be drawn to the interview with Gunvor, where I have discussed how experiences of true belonging (Brown 2017) require *both* a shared and collective experience of community *and* a more individual sense of (self)authenticity and (self)integrity. The word ‘authenticity’ is in this context often associated with dynamics such as being ‘real’ or being ‘true’ (Cambridge Dictionary 2021a), as well as with a notion of ‘true self’ (Hicks et al. 2019). I argue however how a more multifaceted view can be meaningful.

US based Russian researcher focused on, amongst others, transpersonal dynamics Olga R. Sohmer explores the experience of an authentic self from a phenomenological perspective, highlighting several interesting dynamics in addition to the above-mentioned ‘real/truthful expression’. First, the experience of an authentic self is *embodied*. It emerges

out of a somatic sense of presence and awareness, associated with words such as ‘vitality’ and ‘flow’ (Sohmer 2020b: 8-10). Second, the experience of an authentic self is *dynamic*, connected with aspects such as ‘dynamism’ and ‘becoming’ (Sohmer 2020b: 15-16). Furthermore, third, the experience of an authentic self is *relational*, which is highlighted rather succinctly by one of Sohmer’s co-inquirers: “who I am is always in response to someone else or to a situation. And if I just go in search of something authentic independently of a situation or the others that I’m in relationship with, I don’t find anything that I can articulate or grasp (‘Matt’ in Sohmer 2020b: 16).” Fourth, the experience of an authentic self is *multidimensional*. It involves not only the dynamics that one considers authentic and true but also the dynamics that one considers ‘inauthentic’ and ‘false’. Seen from a wider lens, also ‘inauthentic’ dynamics are often true in the situations in which they evolve. Sohmer argues in this respect how an authentic experience of self emerges in-between “our ‘ideal’ and ‘real’ experiences of self. (...) In the ideal qualities that we sometimes experience(...) as well as in the reality of all of our immediate actions and expressions - influenced by our wounds, perceived flaws, limiting patterns, and so forth (Sohmer 2020b: 13).” In this manner, one can perhaps approach the process of authenticity closer in line with what Koppensteiner names ‘soul’. It is the emergence of a “place of authenticity and congruence when the personal self is aligned and in touch with the larger whole (Koppensteiner 2020: 184).” A soulful process of “being... authentic” unfolds with this as a sense of alignment that emerges from ‘within’ yet that knows it is always also ‘without’. It is thus a sense of self that allows one to relate with the surroundings and oneself in ways that appear life-affirming, true, and congruent within each unique moment, which implies to integrate, honor, and respect how one is a unique embodied whole who manifests needs, wishes, longings, and dynamics on their own *and* to integrate, honor, and respect how one is always also a relational being who co-unfolds in relationship with the surroundings.

By allowing such a dynamic, embodied, multifaceted, and relational understanding of authenticity to resonate with and through my embodied whole, I can in this regard feel a gradual sensation of more spaciousness emerging. It is not (yet) a fully open and infinite sensation of space, yet it is a crucial possibility into something new. What this re-thinking of authenticity does to me is in this respect that it begins to undo a deeply integrated yet largely unconscious forced choice that I have embodied out of, amongst others, some ‘disembodied’ onto-epistemological frames that I have (un)consciously lived by. This ‘forced choice’ has taught me how I cannot truly engage myself and my surroundings as simultaneously different *and* the same, conflicting *and* cooperating (Cooper 2010, 1981). Rather, I have needed to engage them as an either-or. I have with this often ended up (un)consciously approaching my surroundings as *either* something to protect myself from - pushing myself away from others - *or* something that I need to welcome and engage at all costs - pushing myself away from my needs to, at times, also be alone and contract ‘inwards’. Ehrenreich interestingly highlights a similar tendency that she argues is present in many so-called ‘Western’ contexts, unfolding out of an (un)conscious ‘idea’ regarding how others are ‘competition’ and ‘obstacles’ within one’s ‘individual pursuit’.

In today’s world, other people have become an obstacle to our individual pursuit. They impede our progress on urban streets and highways; they compete for parking spots and jobs; they drive up the price of housing and “ruin” our favorite vacation spots with their crass enjoyment and noise presence (Ehrenreich 2007: 248).

Without claiming that all people in ‘so-called Western’ contexts (and/or beyond) relate to each other through these rather extreme manners of competition and separation, I underline how I can recognize a comparable dynamic. There is in this sense a (un)conscious propensity in many of my lived contexts to conceptualize oneself and the surroundings as seemingly ‘opposite’ realms, making it difficult to integrate how being alone does not invalidate connection; how connection does not invalidate being alone. An apparently ‘limited amount’ of time, care, attention, resources, and more require with this ‘distribution’

between either oneself or the surroundings. This unfolds self-care as not truly compatible with care for others; presence with oneself as not truly compatible with presence with others.

#### **4.3.4 Onto-Epistemological Dynamics and Embodied Metaphorical Shifts**

I nevertheless underline how these (un)conscious ideas of either-or relationality are importantly never only individually unfolded but always also collectively lived through the (un)conscious ways of thinking that we, as sociocultural groups, embody. Due to the intertwined dynamics between top-down and bottom-up processes, these collective ways of thinking do furthermore, as discussed, influence how we, as individuals and collectives, live and engage ourselves within the world (Siegel 2011, Lakoff and Johnson 1999, Johnson 2007). In other words, we are never only independently living ourselves apart from our surroundings but always also responding to (un)conscious collective frames that we together co-manifest. In this respect, Fogel argues how we (humans) “come into the world wired to make connections with one another, and the subsequent neural shaping of our brain, the very foundation of our sense of self, is built upon these intimate exchanges (Siegel 2011: 10).” We thus “develop in and through relationships” and “each new relationship experience presents another opportunity to move, sense, and feel in deeper, more creative, and more fulfilling ways. Or, the opposite: to limit ourselves so that we do not hurt or get hurt by another person (Fogel 2009: 19).” The relational response that I have highlighted above can in this manner never be ‘removed’ or ‘dismissed’. It can, however, be qualitatively differently engaged.

Tamara reflects in this regard upon how influential “messages” from a ‘Western’ individualized culture that she is/has been embedded in have previously also tended to limit her ongoing potentials for ‘inner-outer’ relationality. Crucially however, new embodied possibilities have for her emerged through, amongst others, practicing Open Floor.

*Tamara: I... don't think there were that many messages... other than in early childhood, but then through... my teenagehood and adulthood (...) I don't think (...) the... relationality of life was really... um ... recognized. Like how important... it is.*



Tamara nods her head in a clear and affirmative movement as if to underline how ‘yes, relationality is important’. She continues.

*Tamara: I mean, I grew up in Serbia, and I wouldn't even say that Serbia is really representative of Western world. But it's enough Western to have this idea of individuality and individualization, and... you know... individual responsibility, and agency, and... which is all important. But somehow it goes at the expense of recognizing that 'yes, I am me in this world, but I'm also... me because of all the people around me and I... keep evolving to exchange, and the more I...'* (Tamara stops her sentence midway while bringing her two hands to her cheeks. It appears to me that she has just realized something important that she wants to share. She continues). *For me now, and this is after years of practicing Open Floor and (...) other similar... methods. I recognize that the more I recognize this (...) relationality, and the more of myself I give to it, the more I actually grow and expand this human... being.*

She nods her head and pauses her words before adding:

*“And so there is this... communication between what happens on the dance floor and what happens... off the dance floor,”* she thoughtfully affirms.

What Tamara emphasizes concerns in this regard three key dynamics. First, there are onto-epistemological “messages” that she - as with everybody - is/has been embedded within, and which, in Tamara’s case, do not always recognize “the relationality of life (...). Like how important... it is.” At the same time, through “Open Floor and (...) other similar... methods” Tamara has, second, found ways to realize how these “messages” are but one possibility amongst many others, coming to realize how “the more [she] recognize[s] this (...) relationality, and the more of [her]self [she] give[s] to it, the more [she] actually grow[s] and expand[s] this human... being.” Third, she underlines how there is also “this... communication between what happens on the dance floor and what happens... off the dance floor,” highlighting with this what Diamond - in the context of theatre - discusses as the dynamic of how “all games are symbolic (Diamond 2007: 91)” because games mirror life and can, “in surprising ways, unlock ways to the issues that the group wants to investigate (Diamond 2007: 91).” In a similar vein, all the dance and movement explorations that are engaged *on* the dance floor in Open Floor can also be symbolic mirrors and lived examples for what can happen and/or is already happening *off* the dance floor.

I underline in this respect one core onto-epistemological “message” especially that is highly relevant related to what Tamara expresses. It revolves around the two dissimilar

notions of ‘self’ previously discussed in chapter 2.3, which concern how so-called ‘Western’ and Buddhist perspectives tend to approach an idea of self through qualitatively different metaphorical understandings. ‘Western’ perspectives tend to approach it through the idea of an individual, non-changing essence whereas Buddhist perspectives tend to approach it through the image of a lived, relational experience of transformation (Epstein 1995). The Buddhist sense of self can thus be seen as an experience that can “never be fully known (...) [yet] felt by the human being (Koppensteiner 2020: 92);” a sense of self that affirmatively engages rather than attempts to deny or ‘control’ ongoing transformation and change. What Tamara previously highlights regarding a possibility to not have to “choose between (...) being... authentic and being with people” brings in this context my attention towards such a key metaphorical shift. In my understanding, Tamara has in many ways moved from a more individualized and static idea of ‘self’ and into a more movement-oriented, embodied, and relational sense of self. This transformed sense of self hence no longer needs to fear others as ‘competition’ or ‘obstacles’ (Ehrenreich 2007) because this transformed sense of self no longer relies upon a stable essence that is ‘threatened’ by the transformative potentials that this relationality involves. Rather, this transformed sense of self already knows it is unfolding in continuous interaction with the surroundings. In this context: what is it with Open Floor that has allowed Tamara to “recognize that the more [she] recognize[s] this (...) relationality [of life], and the more of [her]self [she] give[s] to it, the more [she] actually grow[s] and expand[s] this human... being”? What is it with Open Floor that has allowed her to live this integrated process of onto-epistemological metaphorical transformation both on and off the dance floor? Based upon what she expresses throughout the interview (as well as upon my ongoing discussion during this research so far), I contend how it has to do with how Open Floor is, as engaged, *both* an embodied *and* a relational practice. It therefore carries potentials to facilitate processes that are simultaneously embodied *and* relational.

Open Floor is in this sense, as underlined, a practice that integrates sense, emotional, cognitive, and intuitive processes of wholeness. This point has already been highlighted by Tamara related to first her 5Rhythms experience and I have emphasized how it is equally relevant related to Open Floor. Open Floor works in this context with physically engaging the body in movement - literally dancing and moving - *and* with cognitively integrating how “an engaged mindful exploration allows us to unpack (...) what feelings, sensations, thoughts, images, and sense of spiritual guidance is (...) involved (...) (Open Floor International 2017: 32).” It therefore taps into both bottom-up experience and top-down processing, emerging transformation through a multifaceted flow that allows one to experience *and* realize how one is and becomes an ever-transforming dance of ‘inner-outer’ co-unfolding. Processes of ‘mind’ are tapped into to support top-down neuroplastic dynamics (Siegel 2011: 41-42, Doidge 2007) - which unfold metaphors that ‘highlight’ rather than ‘hide’ embodied ways (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 10-13) - while bodily processes are tapped into to unfold bottom-up ‘visceral maps’, which are integrated flows of information that move from physical experience and into holistic meaning-making processes. Visceral maps, thus, are “a vital source of intuition and powerfully influences our reasoning and the way we create meaning in our lives (Siegel 2011: 43).” At the same time, Open Floor is a practice that integrates a multilayered web of ‘inner-outer’ relationality. It therefore carries potentials to explore how humans are never isolated but relational experiences who continuously co-create through a two-directional ‘inner-outer’ flow. Consequently, humans are influenced and shaped by their surroundings *and* they carry embodied powers to influence and shape their surroundings back (Satir et. al 1991, Badenoch 2017, Brown 2012). In this respect, without *both* this embodied *and* this ‘mental’, as well as without *both* this ‘inner’ *and* this ‘outer’ dimension, I concur how Open Floor would unfold as a practice that manifests less transformative and peace unfolding potentials.

I bring in this regard attention to one core (un)conscious ‘inner-outer’ dynamic that I argue is not always sufficiently recognized within different contexts and fields. I have not personally experienced this dynamic as being overly prominent in Open Floor, yet I can see how it *can* unfold as a shadow side in Open Floor if not consciously engaged. Furthermore, I have felt it in other so-called alternative/embodied settings that I have lived. This dynamic that I refer to concerns in this respect how all types of practices - Open Floor and beyond - cannot truly unfold as transformative if they (un)consciously put all the responsibility for change on individuals alone. What I mean by this can perhaps be explained by highlighting the critical remarks of Norwegian philosopher and psychologist Ole Jacob Madsen (2020) when he comments on a new interdisciplinary curricular topic that was introduced in Norwegian schools during Autumn 2020. This topic is called *Folkehelse og livsmestring* (official translation: ‘health and life skills’ (Udir n.a). Literal translation: ‘public health and mastering life’) and was amongst others introduced as a political response to a steady increase in self-reported mental health struggles amongst Norwegian youth. Madsen questions if this curricular topic is in the end ‘the right medicine for the students’ (*rett medisn for elevene*), bringing attention to how it can potentially also perpetuate some of the over-individualized tendency that might be behind much of the stress and psychological unhealth that the youth are reporting in the first place. This is because the way that this curricular topic is currently focused can, paradoxically, result in more pressure being put on the youth alone to ‘master’ their ‘individual’ lives rather than on transforming the larger sociocultural dynamics that might move behind (Madsen 2020, see also Maté 2022).

Bringing this argument back to Open Floor, I underline how Open Floor can in a similar vein end up neglecting the larger ‘outer’ and ‘surrounding’ realities if it does not consciously integrate how humans are always also relational in this manner. It can with this end up ‘training’ individuals and groups to adapt to, ‘master’, and ‘deal with’ ‘outer’

circumstances that should not always be adapted to. It is for example relevant related to a broader tendency to focus (only) upon *self*-regulation rather (also) *co*-regulation (see also chapter 4.4.3), as well as a tendency to depoliticize and commercialize the so-called ‘wellness industry’ through what Canadian-based writer and researcher Sarah Badr (2022) calls a neoliberal commodification. Psychology researchers based in Canada and the US, Nia L. Phillips, Glenn Adams, and Phia S. Salter argue in this respect, related to a context of racialized oppression, how such an over-individualized approach ultimately unfolds out of a (un)conscious ‘Western’ and colonial perspective that privileges “the atomistic ontology of European modernity (...) [and that] reproduce[s] ongoing [structural] domination by naturalizing and failing to challenge the status quo (Phillips et al. 2015: 371).” To (re)emerge a decolonial and transformative approach, therefore, they suggest moving from a perspective that places the ‘problem’/imbalance with the individual/specific group alone and into an approach that recognizes the larger structural and onto-epistemological imbalances that move behind (Phillips et al. 2015). In the relatable words of Badr: “there is a need to decolonize the wellness industry [and, I add, embodied practices such as Open Floor] (...) [by, amongst others,] re-orienting[ing] [these] practices from being primarily based in an individualistic consumer culture, towards being rooted in a community of radical care (Badr 2022: 7).” As Cohen expresses: too often we tend “to attribute life successes or failures to assets *within* individuals, like diligence and intelligence, while ignoring the importance of assets like trust and belonging that take their form as relations *between* individuals (Cohen 2022: 124).” This noticeably includes to (re)include care for and awareness of our shared planetary and more-than-human home (Badr 2020, Four Arrows 2020).

Even though I have not, as stated, explicitly experienced that this over-individualized tendency is prominent in Open Floor - maybe because relationality is, as Tamara expresses it, “facilitated” in the practice - I contend how it is vital to keep recognizing how an embodied

focus can never mean to disregard collective realities in this manner. It is especially pertinent if one, such as I, wants to engage Open Floor as a practice for peaces. Open Floor (and other practices) needs in this context to become part of a larger process of transformation that engages rather than surpasses the wider relational realities, helping individuals and collectives tap into embodied-relational processes to, as mentioned, reclaim “the felt experience of [our] bod[ies] (...) [as] a political act (...) (Johnson, R 2018: 131).” In my understanding, this can help us co-unfold lived endeavors of connection and community, as we together (rather than alone) work to dissolve shame, disconnection, exclusion, oppression, and more to (re)emerge a shared sense of embodied agency and responsibility. Nonetheless, this recognition of ‘outer’ circumstances does not mean to neglect the equally important powers that we as unique individuals carry as regards influencing our surroundings back. It is in other words not an endeavor of helplessness or denial of responsibility but a deep commitment to recognize both what *is* and what can also become different. As I see it, it is amongst others through this both-and endeavor that Open Floor can unfold as an authentically transformative practice.

#### **4.3.5 The Lived and Paradoxical Practice of Resourcing Oneself in ‘Disembodied’ Settings**

To with this provide an example for how one can tap into Open Floor as such an ‘inner-outer’ practice that neglects neither one’s personal powers to initiate change nor the larger collective frames that one is embedded within, I discuss what Tamara shares when I at one point ask her about how she has “noticed that... Open Floor has changed [her] (...) both on the dance floor, and of course, obviously also off the dance floor.” As a response, Tamara explains how Open Floor has, amongst others, helped her encounter new embodied ways to navigate her academic work environment, which, according to Tamara, can at times be “really goal-oriented, fast-paced, um, often overwhelming.” With the help of Open Floor (and other embodied practices), however, she has found ways to “notice (...) when [her] nervous system

goes into overwhelm,” as well as to know “when is the moment to stop... and pause, and just recalibrate [her]self.” With this, she can emerge a lived “practice of slowing down,” which, in Tamara’s words, involves “learning (...) how to slow down, learning how to pause, eh... learning how when I actually slow down, I reach my goals faster.” This is true even when Tamara “wouldn’t say that [she has] reached a place where [she] feel[s] really... healthy and grounded and (...) present all the time.” Nevertheless, she now has the “tools to notice when [she is] not any of that” as well as the tools to, out of this noticing, “do something... nourishing.”

I ask in this context Tamara about how she manages to keep integrating this lived “practice of slowing down” within her “really goal-oriented, fast-paced, um, often overwhelming” academic work setting. I notice how I am asking this question not only out of my professional curiosity but also out of my lived struggles to, at times, navigate some deeply challenging relational dynamics. I therefore wonder: can the relational realities involved in embodied living also at times make it (too) difficult to unfold embodied peaces? During the interview, I ask Tamara this question by highlighting how I resonate with her struggles of being an embodied-oriented researcher who, at times, can find it hard to emerge embodied ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating within an academic setting.

*Hanne: eh... one thing you said that kind of caught my attention. And... that's partly because I resonate very much with it... is this... eh... notion of academia, which can be... eh, can I say ‘inhospitable place’ at times...*

I laugh self-empathically as I speak my last sentence. I realize how there are some deeply personal experiences behind my choice of the word ‘inhospitable’ above. Nonetheless, I hope that my lightness of tone, laughter, and smile are also telling Tamara that I am (self)empathically aware of this ‘harsh’ choice of words that I am engaging. I keep asking.

*Hanne: it [academia] is goal oriented. It can be very competitive... Um... and then you say that... it [Open Floor] has somehow helped you... notice and slow down and... um... regulate yourself better?*

“Yeah,” Tamara confirms.

*Hanne: but the... surrounding is still there. It's still a competitive... place.*

“Yeah, yeah,” Tamara continues while nodding her head.

*Hanne: how do you... sort of (...) keep integrating that? Because that doesn't change necessarily... even though you change. Or do you experience that it changes because you change?*

Tamara draws her breath, leans backwards as if to sit more steadily on her exercise ball, makes some ‘um’ sounds while thinking, and then begins:

*Tamara: that's a (...) very alive question in my life at the moment. And I go between ‘I wanna... change my career, because... I feel... academia is so challenging to navigate (...) while taking care of... eh, all different aspects ... of... my health and (...) wellbeing’.*

“Um...” she pauses her words before she continues:

*To then (...) remembering my vector, like (...) why was I in academia, what I wanted... to bring... eh, in terms of (...) knowledge and why am I... even interested in embodiment (...). And when I remember that I kind of have more motivation... to stay and keep going (Tamara immediately moves to the next part of her sharing, speaking her next sentence almost as a fluid continuation of her last). And what I've noticed that (...) the slower I am... and the more, eh... clear I am... in what I want to do... in terms of my academic work... the more I'm finding like-minded people who are, you know, objecting the same things in academia, and... the more support... I feel like I'm getting (she draws her breath). And... there is something about... when I'm really... in my body... um... and feeling (...), you know... like grounded, centered, fluid... in a way, (...) I do feel... I would affect a little bit my immediate... environment. Like something would change in my relationships with my colleagues, with my supervisors... There would be more... human to human... connection rather than goal-oriented... communication.*

Tamara pauses her words while making yet another ‘um’ sound together with her thinking. After some further consideration, she adds:

*Tamara: and then again, it's not always available, and I just have to deal with it, that it's not always available. And I still need to be there for myself, because... I... want to live... certain kind of life, and... don't want to neglect... um... yeah, all the wisdom that I get when I'm really... when I feel like... I am present and embodied.*

A bit further on, Tamara speaks a last sentence as regards this topic that we are co-engaging:

*“I find it [academia] as a painful environment to navigate when I'm not at my (...) best,” she ‘concludes’.*

There are in this sense several interesting dynamics that I can emphasize out of what Tamara is sharing above. I want however to highlight the intricate relationship between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ that she expresses, especially related to how she feels that she *is* helping to change her academic work environment when she herself manages to embody a process of becoming “grounded, centered, fluid... in a way.” It happens, amongst others, because she finds ways to slow down and become clear(er) about “what [she] wants to do,” which in turn



helps her encounter “more like-minded people” who make her feel that she is getting “more support.” It thus emerges as a life-affirming feed-back loop where her ‘inner’ nourishes her ‘outer’ and her ‘outer’ nourishes her ‘inner’ anew. At the same time, the last sentence that Tamara speaks above brings attention to how she can still find academia “a painful environment to navigate when [she is] not at [her] (...) best,” which is mirrored in one of her other statements regarding how this ‘inner-outer’ process of co-nourishment is sometimes also “not available” and how she “just ha[s] to deal with it, that it's not always available.” She hence emphasizes how there are surroundings circumstances that can, at times, make an embodied approach to living more difficult to emerge even if she, as Tamara phrases it, still “need[s] to be there for [her]self, because... [she]... want[s] to live... certain kind of life, and... don't want to neglect (...) all the wisdom that [she] get[s] when [she is] really (...) present and embodied.” Her lived “practice of slowing down” therefore seems to emphasize how a relational dance of both ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ is never a linear or one-dimensional endeavor but an embodied process of continuously finding imperfect ways to open up for ongoing relationality and change *and*, at the same time, protect oneself from all potential relationality and change that there is. After all, also harmful dynamics related to, for example, trauma, violence, or more everyday processes of ‘unhealthy’ relationality can, I affirm, be relational processes of change (Pearce 2020, van der Kolk 2014, Badenoch 2017, Mitchels 2006). It is amongst others in this context that I argue it is often the paradoxical dances - those that move through and between borders and openness, stability and change, contraction and expansion - that tend to emerge as the most affirmative ones for embodied wholes.

I highlight with this one of the ten ‘core movement resources’ (see chapter 3.4.1) that Open Floor engages particularly, which can help manifest valuable insights as regards how this imperfect dance of ‘inner-outer’ relationality can be lived. It is the core movement resource named ‘towards and away’, which emphasizes how humans, as contact boundaries

at work, are “almost always moving towards or away from something: a feeling, a place, repetitive thoughts, pleasure, and most often, other people (Open Floor International 2017: 24).” One can with this, through “mindfully practicing the dance of towards and away, (...) learn to actively and honestly choose to go towards or away from anybody or anything (Open Floor International 2017: 24).” It thus includes to find continuous ways to move away from what is experienced and felt as harmful and/or unhelpful *and* to find continuous ways to move towards what is experienced and felt as helpful and life-affirming. In this manner, the paradox of being *both* an individual *and* a relational process intertwines with the paradox of *both* accepting things as they are *and* unfolding further potentials, (re)emerging as a both-and dance. This dance thus contains embodied possibilities to move towards and away from different aspects to protect a sense of self *and* embodied possibilities to move towards and away from different aspects to encounter the affirmative unfamiliarity of change. In other words, it involves a felt sense of (self)stability out of which risky transformations can be dared and a constant flow of unfamiliar encounters out of which this sense of (self)stability can find ways to manifest differently anew. As regards embodied peaces, I re-emphasize how this multidimensional, relational, and paradoxical dance is essential.

#### **4.3.6 Daring Embodied Difference**

Before I close my engagement with this interview encounter with Tamara, I highlight one last aspect that is highly interconnected with my discussion above. This is because it emphasizes the ‘risky’ endeavor of engaging the embodied difference that others unfold as relational potentials for transformation and change rather than as ‘threats’. Tamara begins in this regard to reflect upon how we in Open Floor can help unfold more authentic possibilities for diversity and inclusion in the practice and organization. According to Tamara, we do not currently manifest such a “wider diversity of people on the dance floor” because it is “a bit of... underrepresentation.” This is noticeably also the topic that Tamara and I were, as

mentioned, co-writing an academic article about at the time of the interview (Tjersland and Borovica 2021). The phrase ‘authentic possibilities for diversity and inclusion’ includes in this respect a process that dares the deep work of transformation rather than bypassing the difficulties and tensions involved (Tjersland and Borovica 2021: 2). It builds, amongst others, upon Ahmed’s (2012) warning regarding how many institutions and organization can also use ‘diversity and inclusion’ as an empty catchphrase to make them ‘look good’. This is importantly neither how Tamara nor I approach this topic and work.

In relation to Marisu, I have in this context discussed how a beginning step to a deep-reaching process of transformation can be to engage a two-fold endeavor of self-reflexivity where both Open Floor collectively and individual Open Floor teachers reflect upon ways to take responsibility - falling neither into rigid self-defense nor into paralysis of shame and guilt - for the many ways that we are also implicated in diverse structures of harm even if we have not created or agree with these structures (Rothberg 2019, Kester and Cremin 2017, Tjersland and Borovica 2021). A reflection around categories of identity that we do and do not embody can in this sense help make visible “multiple frames of understanding that either emerge out of [our] positioning or are excluded - become a blind spot - through this positioning (Tjersland and Borovica 2021: 3).” This can in turn help highlight how we, as individuals and as a collective, are both implicated in and resist multiple structural dynamics.

Tamara is in this regard, in my experience, able to manifest such a beginning process of self-reflexivity during our interview encounter. I am not all too surprised about this dynamic, seeing as we are co-writing an article about this topic when the interview is taking place. Tamara expresses in this respect how she, when she first started to engage conscious dance and movement (in Europe and later in Australia), “did not feel so safe... in... mindful

movement environments<sup>84</sup>” because she “felt like... really different than others” due to her experience “of growing up in a war zone, and growing up in a country that fell apart through a bloody... violent... civil war.” This dynamic of feeling not “so safe” and “really different” does however not invalidate the simultaneous recognition that she is making regarding how she in many other areas of her life tend to embody positions that are more privileged. She articulates how she is “pretty middle class, pretty middle age, you know, semi privileged or... quite privileged actually,” thus being able to include her more challenging experiences of embodying difference *and* her more privileged positions without appearing to be overwhelmed or defensive by this so-called ‘contradictory’ field that she is living. She rather highlights how she can embody diverse categories of identity that manifest as privileged and/or less privileged *and* multiple in-between spaces that move beyond and through these identity categories. She hence seems to underline the before-discussed capacity for paradoxical curiosity, which, briefly summed up, involves the ability to approach diverse realities “with an abiding respect for complexity, a refusal to fall prey to the pressures of forced dualistic categories of truth, and an inquisitiveness about what may hold together seemingly contradictory (...) energies (...) (Lederach 2005: 36).”

In addition, Tamara emphasizes another vital aspect that surfaces related to how she at point expresses how her experience of embodying difference, which she articulates alongside her ‘not so different’ embodiments above, can show up through multiple rather than one-dimensional manners on (and off) the dance floor. Some of these manners are more visible and explicit to the surroundings, whereas others are subtler and less outwardly expressive. This multifaceted field of embodied difference raises in this sense a core question for Tamara. She asks: “what is the role of Open Floor teacher, and how much... it’s up to [us] to hold healthy environment and inclusive environment for everyone?” She thus

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<sup>84</sup> Tamara tends to use the phrase ‘mindful movement’ instead of ‘conscious dance and movement’ to describe the type of dance and movement practice that Open Floor is. See also my previous engagement of this point towards the end of the introductory section ‘Peaces (and Unpeaces) from the Life of a Researcher’.

accentuates how teachers (and Open Floor collectively) need to *actively* rather than passively engage the process of manifesting more authentic possibilities for diversity and inclusion.

*Tamara: so I guess it does raise that question ‘what is the role of Open Floor teacher, and how much... it’s up to them [us]... to hold healthy environment and inclusive environment for everyone.’*

Tamara draws her breath and looks up for a short moment before she continues.

*But then... if all [Open Floor] participants are... white, or white-ish, middle class, Western, fairly (...) privileged, usually mid-age, often women... that says something about the effort teacher is making... to reach wider diversity, for me.*

At a later point, she adds:

*As a [Open Floor] teacher, I feel... like, yeah, I want to see it happen in this community. You know, I want to see Open Floor as a more inclusive... practice and environment that is doing it intentionally and not just by ad hoc (...). I want to see us as... organization and teachers who have resources, and strategies, and tools, and who know how to... include more people.*

I wonder with this: what can help us in Open Floor - as individual teachers and as a collective practice/organization - manifest this intentional process of transformation rather than doing it “just by ad hoc?” What can furthermore make it difficult to evolve such a purposeful endeavor of change? I have in this regard already brought attention to some of the dynamics involved in this process related to my previous discussion of an endeavor that is *both* embodied *and* ‘mental’ as well as *both* ‘inner’ *and* ‘outer’. To emerge a deep-reaching process of transformation, however, I simultaneously emphasize the previously engaged interplay between safety/trust and novelty/expansion. It brings, as mentioned, attention to how processes of safe enough and ‘risky’ territories of change need to be dynamically co-engaged. This because it is in the in-between spaces through between these processes that new learning and transformation can evolve.

Tamara articulates in this sense, related to her Open Floor teaching practice, how one of the ways that she has started to engage such an active (rather than passive) process of transformation is by explicitly daring to engage the multiple embodiments of difference that she experiences are moving in her classes and workshops. She does it through, amongst

others, “talk[ing] a lot” with her students “about... um... inclusion, exclusion, diversity, authenticity, allowing everyone to be who they are on the dance floor” even if she recognizes how this engagement can also make “some of us (...) feel not so... safe, or (...) safe-ish.” This is because embodied difference - “people who are just moving in different way, and whose bodies look in a different way, or... you know, who are making... strange and interesting sounds” - can make some of us “feel a little bit... sometimes threatened and sometimes unsure.” Tamara therefore emphasizes how this embodied difference can appear as ‘scary’ and/or ‘uncomfortable’ because it can introduce dynamics of *disequilibrium* and thus propel one into ‘risky’ landscapes of change. In this context, I accentuate how an active engagement with embodied difference can also be experienced as ‘unsettling’ and/or ‘threatening’ because it can move to touch deeply entrenched patterns of privilege, exclusion, violence, and more. Amongst others, it can unfold an embodied encounter with how diverse patterns show up in others and oneself, bringing attention to how there is in the end a violent history behind the ways that this difference came to be classified as ‘difference’ rather than ‘norm’ to begin with (see Rothberg 2003, Menakem 2021). In the context of climate change education, Kelly and Kelly argue how such ‘difficult knowledge’ *is* unsettling because it calls “into question habitual ways of knowing, thinking, and feeling, and arguably, habitual ways of not knowing, not thinking about, not feeling (Kelly and Kelly in Brantmeier and McKenna 2020: 188, based on Zembylas 2014: 406).”

In a similar vein, Tamara affirms how there is “this issue of (...) safety” and the ‘need’ to make everyone “feel safe, because that’s what we cultivate in these [Open Floor] classes, [while] (...) part of diversity work is breaking the bubble of safety.” She moreover underlines how some of these fears might be connected to how we as Open Floor teachers, which I have touched upon related to Marisu, often rely upon dancers and movers returning to our classes and workshops to continue a teaching practice that is financially sustainable.

There is in this sense a need to not only challenge us teachers to dare a risky process of change but also a need to continuously resource and support us teachers to keep endeavoring this process anew. Therefore, to manifest the courage, authenticity, and grounding needed to engage a deep-reaching process of transformation, Open Floor as a collective practice and organization needs to resource and support us as teachers back. It hence manifests a two-directional flow of involvement, feeding back into how the ‘parts’ - the teachers - and the whole - Open Floor collectively - continuously co-nourish each other.

I highlight with this, as a beginning of an end to this subchapter, how the “ability to opt of suffering and injustice is the core of privilege (Brown 2017: 157).” I add that the ability to opt out of *embodied* suffering and injustice is the core of privilege, re-emphasizing how a practice such as Open Floor cannot truly unfold as transformative without daring to, in embodied ways, engage the different structural dynamics that we willingly or unwillingly participate in. Pretending that Open Floor can escape such embodied implication simply because we are a practice that focuses on embodied possibilities for change, would be to limit the transformative potentials that we carry. It hence also mirrors my previous discussion regarding how the responsibility for change cannot be put on individuals alone. Rather, we need to co-engage structural realities *and* lived potentials for change with and through each other. As teachers, practice, and organization, we in Open Floor therefore need to tap into the same embodied wisdom that we teach. We need to continuously resource and support ourselves and each other to co-manifest life-affirming dynamics of safe enough so that risky transformations can be dared *and* an embodied capacity for helpful *disequilibriums* so that this ‘safe enough’ can (re)emerge in ways that transform rather than reproduce/maintain dynamics of harm. We can with this help cultivate a co-nourishing interplay between our many ‘inners’ and ‘outers’. My discussion hence appears to have iterated back to a familiar point. There is, it seems, always a paradoxical both-and dance that is involved.

I ask in this context Tamara about what it is “that made that change” for her, the fact that she “at first (...) did not feel safe [in conscious dance and movement spaces]. (...) But it sounds... like it changed, [she] do[es] feel safe now?” After having confirmed the premise of my question, Tamara describes how her move from feeling not “so safe” and into feeling safe enough has transformed through several interconnected dynamics. It has, first, changed because she has “done lots of work on (...) healing” and of integrating her experience of growing up in a country affected by civil war “in story of [her] life” and to “let go of that story a little bit as well, like, see it as a story and not (...) who [she is].” Second, it has changed because “over the years [she has] cultivated many... beautiful... friendships and... connections in the dance community (...). And (...) so [she] feel[s] more accepted by it.” Third, it has changed out of how she has herself stepped “into... teacher shoes and being like ‘okay, so this is what [she] felt was missing... when [she] started teaching.’” She can therefore by now explore how she, as a teacher, can “be as inclusive... as [she] can.”

Tamara seems with this to, at the one hand, have engaged a similar ‘inner-outer’ process that I have argued related to her lived “practice of slowing down” in her academic work environment. Her ‘inner’ process of “healing” and of integrating her story of “growing up in a country that fell apart” thus seems to have co-unfolded with her ‘outer’ process of cultivating “many beautiful friendships... and connections in the dance community.” There is with this an ongoing interplay between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ that (re)manifests. At the other hand, through becoming herself an Open Floor teacher with the agency and possibility to transform the same dynamics that she at one point found difficult, Tamara has felt safer. The same process that Marisu articulates concerning how one can move from a personal process of healing and into a practice of sharing these healing potentials with other thus becomes visible. Tamara, however, confirms how this practice of sharing continuously also empowers and nourishes the teacher anew. She hence echoes Koppensteiner’s insight regarding how



“unfolding and contributing to the unfolding of others cannot be separated and are, in the end, the same thing (Koppensteiner 2020: 6).”

In this sense, Tamara and I have during this subchapter co-reflected our way through an engaged encounter where the dynamic of ‘inner-outer’ relationality has stood out as the guiding thread. We have in this context explored how Open Floor can help facilitate wholeness-oriented potentials for ‘inner’ (self)relations *and* wholeness-oriented potentials for ‘outer’ relations, thus not forcing one “to choose between (...) being... authentic and being with people.” It vitally includes the honest and active practice of moving towards and away to engage the transformative potentialities that relationality unfolds in ways that affirm rather than harm/deny ‘inner-outer’ wholeness. Top-down dynamics of ‘mental’ meaning-making in combination with bottom-up experience (re)manifest with this as vital, considering how the active and honest practice of towards and away requires both a ‘mental’ awareness and engagement with what *is* and a lived unfolding of new embodied potentialities.

The last topic that Tamara and I submersed ourselves in - the practice of unfolding more authentic possibilities for diversity and inclusion in Open Floor - does in this regard evolve out of a similar ‘inner-outer’ engagement. As teachers and practice/organization, we need in this sense to support and nourish both ourselves and each other to actively engage the transformative unfamiliarity that embodied difference unfolds *and*, at the same time, manifest a crucial presence of safe enough, grounded enough, stable enough. If one of these - safety or risk - are denied, I contend how little transformation can arise. With these multiple ‘inner-outer’ insights in mind, thus, I move to engage the interview with Imraan in the following.

#### **4.4 Imraan - *Co-Unfolding Interpersonal Processes of Healing***

Imraan is a centered, heartfelt, and unpretentious Open Floor teacher in the end of his 40’s who is currently based in Brussels, Belgium. What made me decide to interview him for this research is however not (only) his present-day place of living and working but the

prominently global touch to his life. On the self-authored presentation that he has written on the Open Floor International homepage, Imraan states: “I am (...) born and raised in South Africa under Apartheid<sup>85</sup>. I lived in London for 15 years before settling in Belgium in 2016. I consider myself a citizen of the world, with Indian ancestry and African roots (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Find a Teacher: Imraan’).” The Indian ancestry that Imraan mentions comes in this context from his father, who Imraan during the interview describes as a Sufi believer who brought Sufi perspectives into the family<sup>86</sup>. Furthermore, this Indian ancestry has given Imraan a brown skin color, which is relevant related to what he later expresses as regards growing up during the South African apartheid regime.

During our meeting, Imraan explains how his journey towards Open Floor has involved several other embodied practices along the way, mentioning practices that are *not* based in dance and movement<sup>87</sup> as well as the 5Rhythms and Open Floor. In this respect, he

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<sup>85</sup> The official South African apartheid regime lasted from 1948 to 1994, although racial discrimination was obviously also present before apartheid became law. During these many years in power, the apartheid regime carried out a visibly oppressive and violent politics where people were segregated based on categories of race within most areas of their lives, including schooling, public transport, living, as well as more. In this system, the ‘white’ minority enjoyed extensive privileges whereas the ‘non-white’ majority - which originally included two main groups, ‘native (black)’ and ‘colored’, yet that later got subdivided into seven categories within the ‘colored’ group - were systematically underprivileged and oppressed. The word ‘apartheid’ comes from Afrikaans and means ‘apartness’. See Clark and Worger 2004. See also Jacobs 2021 for an interesting take on the complexities involved in Muslim identities in South Africa (Cape Town especially), considering how many Muslims were classified as either ‘colored’ or ‘Indian’ during the apartheid regime and thus simultaneously ‘non-white’ and racialized as different from ‘black’ through willed politics of division and rule.

<sup>86</sup> Sufism is Islamic mysticism. It encompasses diverse schools, practices, teachings, traditions, and rituals that are often influenced by and adapted into local contexts (Rehman in Dietrich et al. 2014). It is therefore not one single Sufi expression but different varieties that center around a shared core of teachings and understandings. Sufism can with this be said to revolve around diverse beliefs, teachings, rituals, and practices that help bring humans into contact with the Divine through direct, experiential encounters. Inayat Khan emphasizes in this regard the fundamental love for God and for the Divine within oneself and in other beings, the unfolding of soul, the importance of dynamic balances, the cultivation of ‘inner’ life, as well as the authentic happiness that emerges from the spiritual path (Inayat Khan quoted in Witteveen 2013). He moreover describes how “Sufism is a religion if one wants to learn religion from it; it is a philosophy if one wants to learn wisdom from it; it is mysticism if one wishes to be guided by it in the unfoldment of the soul. And yet it is beyond all these things. It is the light, it is the life which is the sustenance of every soul, and which raises a mortal being to immortality. It is the message of love, harmony, and beauty (Inayat Khan quoted in Witteveen 2013: ‘Sufism’).” In a similar vein, Høystad brings attention to how Sufism is “an esoteric (i.e. an exclusively internal) doctrine, and thus essentially alien to the exoteric (external). [It is therefore] impossible to describe in conventional language without becoming something else (Høystad 2007: 82).” Sufism is with this not first and foremost “a theory (...), but a practice (Høystad 2007: 82).” Interestingly for this research, Sufi practices include, amongst others, the use of devotional music and ritual movements (dance) to ecstatically and in embodied manners emerge a direct and experiential closeness with God (see Høystad 2007: 87-88, Rehman in Dietrich et al. 2014: 160-161).

<sup>87</sup> Imraan talks especially about different expressions of body-focused psychotherapy as well as Tantra.

articulates how he first discovered the 5Rhythms practice when he lived in London in 2007. When Gabrielle Roth (the creator of 5Rhythms) passed away in 2012, he moreover began to hear rumors about Open Floor before the practice was created. This was because he was close with several of the Open Floor founders and founding members through multiple 5Rhythms workshops/classes from before. Imraan decided in this context to wait with training as a conscious dance and movement teacher - a decision that he had already made - because he wanted this new practice, Open Floor, to begin conducting their teacher-training first. In 2015, he therefore joined the first cohort of teachers that were trained by Open Floor International and graduated as part of the first ‘teacher batch’ in 2018.

What appears to have been a particularly influential experience along this embodied path of Imraan is his participation in an ongoing dance and movement group from 2012 to 2014/2015. This group was facilitated by Andrea Juhan (one of the Open Floor founders) and was focused upon the theme of *Libido*<sup>88</sup>. This theme revolves, as mentioned, around dynamics of sexuality, intimacy, boundaries, relationship, and ‘life force’ from an embodied perspective, manifesting as a mindful, creative, and symbolic exploration into different dynamics of sexuality, relationality, boundaries, creativity, aliveness, and more through engaging dance and movement. When Imraan attended this ongoing Libido group in 2012-2014/2015, Andrea Juhan based in most of her teaching in the 5Rhythms practice rather than in Open Floor because Open Floor, as discussed, only came to life *during* these years that the Libido group lasted (in 2013/2014). Nevertheless, the Libido work that Imraan then experienced share important commonalities with how Juhan later helped co-create as well as now facilitates Open Floor. Imraan’s experiences with the Libido ongoing group can hence be seen as a landscape that moves through and between both the 5Rhythms practice and Open Floor. It is also in this way that I engage it within following my discussion.

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<sup>88</sup> As mentioned, the Libido focus in Open Floor has currently transformed into an expanded focus that is called ‘embodied sexuality’. See Open Floor International 2018: ‘OFI Libido becomes Embodied Sexuality’, as well as chapter 3.4.

When it comes to being a dance and movement teacher, Imraan only mentions teaching Open Floor. He chose in this context to teach Open Floor because he “loved” the “value system” of Open Floor International, as well as because he resonated with the Open Floor curriculum. Particularly, he appreciated the “mindset” of Open Floor International in terms of licensing the practice under Creative Commons. This meant, as Imraan himself expresses it, that “knowledge is for everyone, knowledge is not (...) monetized.”<sup>89</sup> Due to this resonance with the Open Floor values (both the values surrounding licensing as well as other values), Imraan decided to join Open Floor International as a volunteer working member already in 2014. This was therefore before he began training as a teacher. Still today, he is a volunteer working member in the circle called ‘tech’<sup>90</sup>.

One can in this respect notice how many (yet not all) of the dance and movement experiences that Imraan expresses during our interview encounter have primarily unfolded through the 5Rhythms practice rather than through Open Floor. This is because Imraan immediately transitioned into becoming a teacher as soon as he began engaging Open Floor. As I have primarily asked him about his experiences as a dancer and mover rather than as a teacher, therefore, I have received stories that mainly center around the 5Rhythms part of his conscious dance and movement path. I thus, importantly, approach the content of this interview slightly differently from the other interviews that I have engaged. Instead of looking for a simultaneous integration and differentiation between the 5Rhythms and Open Floor, I relate to both practices as expressions of a larger conscious dance and movement field. I hence discuss the experiences that Imraan shares as expressions that highlight the shared potentials of this larger field, acknowledging how Open Floor is not an island that is separated from the wider family of conscious dance and movement that it belongs within.

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<sup>89</sup> See chapter 3.1.2 as regards what it means that Open Floor is licensed under Creative Commons.

<sup>90</sup> “The Tech Circle develops and supports technology solutions, keeping all Working Members connected and supporting educational programs (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Our People’).”

When Imraan and I meet for the interview encounter - which happens on a late Wednesday evening in the beginning of March 2021 - it is not the first time that we are encountering each other. Rather, the first time that we met was in 2017, which was at the beginning of my Open Floor teacher-training program. Imraan, as one of the volunteer ‘techies’<sup>91</sup> of Open Floor International, was present during this teacher-training module to offer technical support to the teaching staff as well as to help us - the teachers-in-training - understand the world of DJ programs a little bit better. I can in this context vividly remember a sweaty experience on a warm summer evening outside of Montpellier, Southern France (which was where the Open Floor teacher-training program that I joined took place). It was June 2017, and I was present as a teacher-in-training while Imraan, very patiently, tried to teach us - a room full of technically anxious teacher-in-training souls - how to manage the basics of the DJ program we were using. All credit to Imraan for managing to stay calm and patient in that setting. I can still remember how my forehead was boiling after only a few minutes in that room, experiencing what almost seemed like a collective expression of ‘technology fear’. Luckily however, with the calm, centered, and grounded help from Imraan, as well as from other colleagues who understood the DJ program well, I managed to learn the basics of the program we were using so that I could start exploring the art of teaching with music on my own. Still today, I find the dynamics of collaborating with music as a ‘co-teacher’ - which is one of the ways that how Open Floor International phrases this approach to teaching (Open Floor International 2017: 62) - to be one of the most creative dynamics that are involved in teaching Open Floor.

The qualities of calmness, centeredness, and grounding that Imraan portrayed during that evening of 2017 are notably also present within our interview encounter. Out of the seven Open Floor teachers that I have interviewed, Imraan is the one who speaks the slowest

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<sup>91</sup> ‘Techie’ is the word that Imraan himself uses to describe how he is a member of the ‘tech’ working circle.

and takes the most pauses during his sharing. It does not mean that he is less engaged in what he is speaking but that the quality of his presence is qualitatively different than, for example, the highly enthusiastic, high-spirited, and physically expressive presence of Marisu. Imraan comes in this context across as prominently tranquil, soft, unhurried, and gentle - both towards me, and importantly also towards himself.

One of the first aspects that I notice when I log on to meet Imraan via Zoom is in this respect how he is sitting in a cozy and dimly lit room with a decorative chain of lights in the background as the most visible light source. He is moreover playing a calm and spiritual type of music (which he pauses before we start to speak), which I believe I can recognize as Sufi or Sufi inspired tones. The music and the light that I experience make me smile. It feels as if I am witnessing someone who is intentionally taking care of himself by creating a small space of calmness in his everyday life. Adding to this how Imraan is wearing a grey, toned-down, and relaxed hoodie rather than formal or brightly colored clothes, I feel how I am invited to settle back and embrace this interview atmosphere as a call to slow down and listen without hurry or urgency. Considering how Imraan and I are, in Belgium and Norway respectively, experiencing some of the strictest and most challenging Covid-19 restrictions of that winter when the interview is taking place, I furthermore notice how I am authentically enjoying witnessing and receiving this act of self-care that Imraan seems to be manifesting and that I feel invited to join. I notice how any small or large act of self-care that I witness or give to myself at this point gifts me with a life-affirming boost of energy. This winter of 2021 - the winter of a global pandemic and, on a personal level, the winter after my father passed away - has undoubtedly been one of the most challenging winters in my life. It has therefore made me acutely aware of how important care for self and others is in the middle of collective and personal crises. It is particularly true when one of our primary needs as embodied wholes - physical rather than only virtual contact with others - has been hugely restricted due to the

pandemic regulations in place. I have in this context come to realize how the lack of such physical contact prominently challenges my own experiences of and capacities for wellbeing, peaces, inspiration, balance, and creativity. It is amongst others because of this that the call to self-care that Imraan seems to be manifesting and that I feel invited to join appears so precious. It renews my awareness of how seemingly ‘simple’ steps can still make small and everyday livings of peaces possible - even in the middle of deeply challenging situations.

#### **4.4.1 An Interpersonal Path of Healing**

To begin discussing the interview encounter with Imraan, I begin - in difference from the other interviews that I have engaged so far - at the end rather than at the beginning of our meeting. This is because Imraan towards the end speaks a sentence that stands out as one of the most significant ones that he shares. After having articulated some reflections about how his path of teaching Open Floor has become a path “of teaching... by... showing... [his] humanity,” as well as about how he finds that this approach to teaching can be important also for others, amongst others in relation to healing (which is an aspect that I can recognize from Marisu’s integration of her human ‘brokenness’ into her teaching as well), Imraan briefly pauses his words before he nods his head and voices “yeah. I feel this path for me is a lot about healing. I’ve used this word a lot.”

This dynamic of healing noticeably runs through the whole interview encounter with Imraan. It emerges already in his initial story, which unfolds out of my beginning question regarding “what made [Imraan]... come to Open Floor specifically,” and dances through nearly all the way to end to culminate in the sentence quoted above as an almost ‘concluding remark’ to what the interview has been about. With “this path” of “healing,” therefore, Imraan refers not only to how his professional path of teaching Open Floor has, amongst others, become about facilitating ‘human’ possibilities for healing for others. He also refers to how his personal path of engaging conscious dance and movement has been a healing

journey. In this sense, Imraan uses, at several different points, words such as “healing” and “healed” to describe how practicing conscious dance and movement has unfolded changes in his life. What he expresses shares with this important commonalities with what Marisu engages, as also Marisu articulates a dance and movement journey that centers around healing. In Imraan’s case, however, the healing process seems to be more directly focused on *interpersonal* dynamics, which is different from Marisu who expresses a more *intrapersonal* journey. Nevertheless, and as engaged, ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ always intertwine.

I emphasize in this regard how the *interpersonal* quality that I experience in relation to what Imraan expresses unfolds out of how he, throughout our meeting, articulates a variety of interrelational dynamics. He expresses these dynamics *both* as regards what has made him embark on a healing journey *and* as regards what has helped him unfold healing in different ways. These dynamics concern his background of growing up as a ‘non-white’ person (which is a term that Imraan himself uses) during the South African apartheid regime, his background of growing up in a family influenced by Sufi perspectives, his multiple engagements with conscious dance and movement as a dancer and mover (through the 5Rhythms practice, the Libido ongoing group, and Open Floor), his experiences as a newcomer in London and Brussels, as well as his current practice as an Open Floor teacher. In the following, I engage dynamics that stand out as most important in relation to this multifaceted field of relationality that Imraan embodies, emphasizing how my engagement is an imperfect endeavor. It therefore dances through and within a diverse web of dynamics that are all relevant and important yet that cannot all be fully grasped, analyzed, and connected at every point. I thus ask the reader to gradually rather than straightforwardly dance with me towards a larger whole that can slowly reveal meaningful insights concerning how, and perhaps how not, a practice such as Open Floor can support an embodied web of peaces by engaging an interpersonal “path” that, as mentioned, “is a lot about healing.”



#### 4.4.2 (Traumatic) Experiences of Structural Violence

To begin, I underline Imraan's relational background of growing up as a 'non-white' person during the South African apartheid regime. I emphasize this relational background, first, because it emerges as highly significant related to what Imraan later expresses connected to healing. Second, it moves to engage a relational web that is deeply relevant for peace research, highlighting dynamics of race, (un)belonging, identity, othering, as well as structural and physical violence. Nevertheless, I do not first and foremost discuss these dynamics from a social and analytical perspective but focus on what this structurally violent web of relational experience might imply as regards Imraan's healing path. As such, my focus is, as always, upon a narrative way 'to open windows' (Josselson 2011: 239) into a multifaceted realm of embodied meaning-making processes. In this respect, at especially two points during the interview, Imraan describes parts of how he experienced the societal and communal context that he grew up in.

*Imraan: because I grew up in a...*

Imraan looks down while he appears to be thinking about how to formulate his next words.

*in a...*

He keeps looking down, thinking. Then, it appears that he is preparing himself for speaking by swallowing and moistening his lips. He expresses:

*Imraan: in a society where it was very much the shadow masculine. Now, apartheid with... violence and... curfews and... the army and... beatings and... yeah, people disappearing and... yeah, being tortured.*

"So (...) it was very... violent," he straightforwardly adds.

At a later point:

*Imraan: Yes, so I grew up in a... in a very... hmm, how do I put it? (Imraan draws his breath). This society I grew up in was not very healthy. Um... (...) and was... a bit... warped, I would say. I grew up in a society where... (...) it was under apartheid in South Africa, which meant that... eh... (he makes a slight, almost ironic sound of laughter before he proceeds). There were (...) like (...) the bus was either for... white people or... people... (he visibly rolls his eyes) non-white people. So it was like (...) an absence of color.*

From here, Imraan begins to describe multiple ways that the apartheid system forced him and those around him to live in segregated ways based on the color of their skin.

**Imraan:** *um... cinemas the same, you know, cinemas for white people, cinemas for people... who are not white. Eh... same with the beach. Same with.... everything, like (...). Where you lived as well... although living was... even more complicated because they split it into four... separate... races. Except that... (...) they didn't have too much of a problem with the other races mixing, but... (...) no ways you were gonna to be mixing with the white group. They even had something called the Immorality Act, which meant... that if you are found having... sex with someone, a white person, and you are not white, then you would... go to jail, because it was (...) um, illegal.*

I notice how I find it rather painful to listen to what Imraan is expressing. I am trying to imagine what living within such a system would imply, starting to think about my husband and myself. Since I am white and my husband is brown, our love and relationship would be fundamentally unwanted and even illegal within this frame. It hurts to think about, and it makes me angry and even a bit scared. I know how the core ideas of racism that fueled this system are by no means dead or irrelevant. I bring my attention back to Imraan, allowing myself to *both* feel my reactions *and* listen to what he is speaking at the same time.

**Imraan:** *um, so... eh, it was very... (Imraan begins to laugh in a manner that appears simultaneously ironic and more-than-ironic, almost emerging as a strange coming together of resignation and 'amusement' in relation to the absurdity of the situation of which he is speaking) oppressive, eh... (...) society that I grew up in, and it was very warped.*

"*Aaand...*", Imraan continues "*the community I grew up in I also found very racist because they were... (...) everyone was brainwashed, right?*" He seems to confirm his statement by shaking his head in a manner that says 'yes, this is the absurdity of the situation that I had to grow up with!' "*(...) you know (...) people would be talking about 'they', 'they', 'they'. I hated this 'they' thing. You know, 'they', 'they', it's like, almost like everyone's a... a monolithical... object of everyone's the same, which...*"

Imraan visibly rolls his eyes while almost whispering his last sentence with a mixture of irony, absurdity, and resignation:

*"is obviously not true,"* he 'concludes'.

Without in this context claiming that Imraan is traumatized - on the contrary, he never uses the words 'trauma' or 'traumatized' during our interview - I accentuate how what Imraan shares above moves to touch a potentially traumatic field of experience. I say this because Imraan expresses a visibly violent and oppressive context that seems to have influenced both himself and those around him in felt, embodied manners. What Imraan shares above can in this sense help bring attention to a vital intersection between oppression, violence, trauma, and embodiment, which can help underline how structural dynamics of oppression often carry lived, embodied consequences as well as can emerge embodied processes of trauma/trauma-like sensations. It is in other words a relational

field of experience that can influence individuals and groups in both long-term and significant manners (Mitchels 2006, Johnson, R 2018, Menakem 2017, Yoder 2005, van der Kolk 2014). According to US-based scholar and practitioner in somatic psychology

Lucia Bennett Leighton:

not only can experiences of oppression manifest in the body analogous to trauma through restriction of movement, disconnection to the body, and hypervigilance, but oppression also requires that marginalized groups adapt their body language, movement style, and verbal communication to fit the hegemonic norm, which further restricts movement and expression. (...) Oppression thus affects how we interact with others how we conceptualize and internalize a sense of self, and what we learn to expect from our environments (Leighton in Caldwell and Leighton 2018: 25).

Levine (2010) argues in this respect how an experience of trauma is an inhibited response in the embodied organism whereby dynamic equilibriums have not managed to re-emerge after experiences of or exposure to situations that are felt as physically and/or emotionally life threatening. It thus involves a felt sense of ‘immobilization’ as regards not being able to move from a survival response and into something else. Dynamics of violence are in this context prominent examples of what can unfold such physical and/or emotional sensations of one’s life being at risk yet, crucially, violence does not by default unfold trauma responses. Rather, to emerge a lived experience of trauma, embodied wholes first need to experience a perceived life-threatening situation as overwhelming by a too high arousal of the nervous system and, subsequently, enter a paralyzed and ‘stuck’ process whereby they cannot manage to restore dynamic balance anew. The ‘stuck’ process of trauma can with this also find ways to heal if one - carefully and with enough support - manages to helpfully reintroduce new movement that initiate homeostasis again. In a similar vein, a trauma response can be ‘prevented’ if embodied wholes find ways to dynamically emerge new dynamic equilibriums after an exposure to threat before this new balance is overly inhibited and/or stopped (see also van der Kolk 2014, Levine and Frederick 1997, Badenoch 2017). Vitality however, such a movement-oriented understanding of trauma does not mean to advocate an

oversimplified approach whereby one can simply ‘begin to move’ and the harmful effects of overwhelming situations will be magically ‘healed’. Rather, although movement is crucial, the introduction of this movement needs to be done in a resource-based manner whereby individuals and groups can practice nervous-system regulation and their abilities to feel (relationally) safe enough again (van der Kolk 2014: 204). Juhan affirms: “one of the primary skills needed in traumatic or post traumatic situations is the ability to calm one’s self and to settle one’s nervous system (...) (Juhan 2003: 113).” It therefore involves life-affirming ways to expand rather than rupture one’s before-discussed ‘windows of tolerance/presence’ (Siegel 137-139, Open Floor International 2017: 133), which is interestingly also a similar approach that Johnson argues related to transforming embodied implications of structural oppression and violence (Johnson, R 2018).

What I importantly notice concerns in this sense how Imraan, as touched upon, does *not* seem to talk about the structural violence that he has experienced in his life as dynamics that have elicited trauma responses. On the contrary, he appears to continuously integrate these experiences into the ongoing flow of his life through the interpersonal path of healing underlined. This is true even if he expresses how many of these experiences have been difficult. I become in this context curious to explore what might have helped Imraan emerge this more dynamic rather than ‘stuck’ relationship to his past, seemingly unfolding *movement* rather than *inhibition of movement* in relation to his experiences. I vitally intuit that it might have to do with, amongst others, how his interpersonal path of healing has not only unfolded out of how he has engaged certain practices/spaces by themselves - including, yet not limited to the 5Rhythms and Open Floor<sup>92</sup> - but also out of how he has lived relational experiences

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<sup>92</sup> Imraan is importantly clear about how his healing path has not only emerged through conscious dance and movement practices (including 5 Rhythms and Open Floor) but also through multiple other practices, spaces, and people. For example, he speaks about his family and their Sufi-inspired ‘mindset’ in a visibly loving manner, highlighting how his family had a “very different mindset” as compared to their apartheid-influenced surroundings as well as how they “call it [Sufism] the religion of love. So it’s about (...) accepting everyone as different, eh, accepting... that... everyone’s path is different, (...) not believing that your path is right.”

through these practices/spaces that have helped him co-unfold his healing path as, exactly, an *interpersonal* rather than purely *intrapersonal* process. In this respect, the deeply relational nature of both healing and trauma becomes vital to emphasize.

#### **4.4.3 Embodied Processes of Co-Regulation, Shame, and (Wider) Emotional Expression**

According to Badenoch, the heart of healing as well as of preventing trauma from embedding is the supportive and co-regulative encounters with others. This is because humans are deeply relational and thus: “the essence of trauma isn’t events, but aloneness within them. Who we perceive as being with us *before, during* and *after* an event is central to our ability to integrate the trauma throughout our embodied and relational brains (Badenoch 2017: 25. Emphasis in original).” All nervous system regulation unfolds with this relationally, which implies that *both* the visible co-regulation that happen in physical presence with another *and* the seemingly more individual and ‘inner’ process of co-regulation are relational. As such, an ‘inner’ (self)regulative dynamic manifests out of an embodied capacity to internalize the experience of nurturing others as an ‘inner’ source of support also when these others are not physically present. Consequently, who we are with - externally *and* internally - is crucial for whether a trauma gets ‘stuck’ or whether potentially overwhelming experiences get integrated into an ongoing, homeostatic movement. Vitaly therefore, instead of “advocating teaching self-regulation, we might speak about entering into relational environments that support internalizations of nurturing others (...) (Badenoch 2017: 193).”

During our interview, Imraan importantly appears to articulate a similar process of healing that is profoundly *co-regulative*. He hence seems to underline an ongoing endeavor of finding new and different ways to express his “difficult emotions” *in relation with others*,

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Furthermore, he expresses how he has also needed to work with a body-based psychotherapist related to “masculinity... [his] relationship with [his] father, and... relationship with authority” because these dynamics were “mixed up because of this whole apartheid... situation.” He thus articulates how he not “have gotten there [healed]... just purely by doing the dance” because “sometimes you need to (...) talk about things. And have the other person... inquire... in a different way [than] on the dance floor. (...) Sometimes there's something that's... stuck. And... working with it... with a therapist (...) is completely different.”

emphasizing a crucial relational tread that connects and intertwine many of the healing dynamics that emerge. He brings in this sense attention to a central element that keeps re-emerging at several points during our interview. It concerns how Imraan, at least previously in his life, seems to have engaged an (un)conscious idea regarding how some of his emotions are “bad” while others are “good”. The “bad” ones, furthermore, ‘should not’ and ‘cannot’ be expressed in relation with others. At one point, Imraan articulates how a large portion of this idea, although not all of it, has emerged out of influential relational dynamics that he experienced in the community of his upbringing. He explains how an (overly) service-oriented focus in this community has tended to manifest a “very, very... unconscious belief” in him as regards how he has to put “other people's needs over [his]” because if he would not be doing that it would be “bad” and he would be “doing something wrong.” As an important side note in this respect, the expression of needs intimately interlinks with the expression of emotions (Rosenberg 2015).

*Imraan: what... I found was, in my relationships... [also outside of his community and at later points in his life] (...) I found it very difficult to communicate... eh, when things, my emotions, where things were going wrong.*

He inhales.

*(...) I grew up in a (...) community (...) where... service was very important. Which is, there's nothing wrong with that, being in service, but... eh, I grew up with this... very, very... unconscious belief that (...) other people's, eh... (...) needs were more important.*

Imraan pauses his words before he continues.

*Imraan: so I would (...) put other people's needs over mine. And... if I... was... not able to help them [the other people] (...) then I felt bad, like I was doing something wrong.*

Even though Imraan never uses the word ‘shame’ in his explanation above - or during the interview at large - I find in this regard that the relational topic of shame previously engaged related to Marisu re-emerges as relevant. I find in this context that the other words that Imraan uses, including “bad” and “wrong”, potentially move to touch a fabric of shame. Furthermore, having myself experienced how several people close to me have struggled with

psychological illness, I know all too well the shame that can emerge when you (un)consciously believe that you have to “put other people's needs over [your own]” - make those around you ‘feel better’ - and how you, when you are not able to do this, feel “bad, like [you are] doing something wrong.” I propose in this respect how Imraan might, in a comparable vein, have previously found it challenging to relate in more open, authentic, and dynamic manners because he has, in a shame-like way, potentially carried around dynamics of himself - “difficult emotions” - that he believed that he had to ‘hide’ (Brown 2012, Bradshaw 2005). This shame-like dynamic might moreover have influenced his ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating. Nevertheless, Imraan emphasizes, as mentioned, how he also has engaged and keeps engaging an interpersonal process of healing in relation to this point. He does, as stated, not appear ‘stuck’ but seems to co-unfold an imperfect process of healing. A key healing potential appears in this respect to have emerged because he has been able to manifest co-regulative processes on and off the dance floor through exploring, in Imraan’s words, “how to be vulnerable. How to be, um... authentic. (...) How to remain in integrity, (...) and, eh... intimacy, exploring intimacy in different ways.” The four key words that stand out of these sentences - vulnerability, authenticity, integrity, and intimacy - emerge in this regard as core relational processes that Imraan seems to have cultivated and manifested through conscious dance and movement (including the 5Rhythms practice, the Libido ongoing group, and Open Floor). This, in turn, seems to have helped him co-evolve an imperfect path of healing. In the following, I explore the healing, dynamic, and sometimes paradoxical interplay that emerges between these four words that Imraan engages.

#### **4.4.4 Processes of Intimacy, Vulnerability, Authenticity, and Integrity**

To explore this healing, dynamic, and sometimes paradoxical interplay that emerges between vulnerability, authenticity, integrity, and intimacy, I center my exploration around one concrete conscious dance and movement situation that Imraan expresses. I find that my

engagement can emerge more meaningfully in this manner, allowing it to dance deep into one concrete embodied living. I do however also touch upon several intertwined experiences that Imraan expresses, underlining how the situation that I explore is neither the only nor the most important one to engage. Rather, it is one out of many examples within a relational web of healing that Imraan has lived. In this respect, the situation that I discuss is a situation that unfolded during the first Libido workshop that Imraan joined. It was facilitated by Andrea Juhan and took place in Amsterdam in 2012/2013 (Imraan is not sure about the exact year). It was however not yet the Libido ongoing group that I have mentioned earlier, but Imraan's first encounter with the Libido topic on the dance floor. It was hence also the workshop that later led him towards the Libido ongoing group. In my discussion, I refer to this workshop as the *introductory* Libido workshop to differentiate it from the later ongoing group discussed.

Imraan articulates how this introductory Libido workshop - or rather the dynamics that emerged for him through engaging the Libido topic on the dance floor - "kicked [his] ass" because he has grown up in a "culture where... this whole life force energy, this sexual energy (...) was very taboo." This workshop therefore unfolded a prominently intense process, connecting him to some challenging relational dynamics that associate especially with the society and community of his upbringing. In this regard, Imraan explains how he on the morning of the second workshop day experienced multiple embodied manifestations for this intensity that he was living, amongst others connected to how he "kept jumping on the wrong (...) underground" and therefore arrived "over half an hour" late to the workshop space. These embodied manifestations, moreover, made him realize how he was, in fact, feeling "awful." This, in turn, allowed him to unfold a greater sense of clarity and later allowed him to dare being held by a relational container - his 'pod'<sup>93</sup>.

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<sup>93</sup> A 'pod' is a term used to describe a group of 3-4 dancers/movers that is often formed in the beginning of an Open Floor workshop. It functions as a supportive, relational container to share experiences and reflections from the workshop as long as the workshop lasts. Usually, a day and/or a session will be closed by inviting dancers and movers to go to their pod and share as much or little as they want about what is currently present with them.



**Imraan:** *I woke up [on the morning of the second workshop day] and I had all these, eh, cold sores (Imraan shares a slight and seemingly self-empathic smile while he appears to be thinking back at this workshop experience). So all this stuff had been stirred up. And I remember trying to get to the [workshop] venue, and I kept jumping on the wrong (...) underground (...). Like I'd... go there (he points his finger to the side as if to show me how he went in the wrong direction). And then I'd be like (he keeps pointing his finger in different directions while he is speaking low to himself, almost mumbling) 'oh, shit! Does this suppose to change there?' And then I'*

Imraan starts speaks louder and clearer again, shifting his focus from speaking primarily to himself to also speaking to me.

**Imraan:** *(...) it took me... over half an hour... extra [to get to the workshop space]. And I was thinking, like 'something's going on here'. Like... (...) my body (...) my mind was trying to find ways (...) not to go there [to the workshop]. (Imraan moves his hands up and around his head as if to show me the 'cloud' and the 'fog' that he is speaking of next) And I felt like I was in this real cloud... like, completely like a fog (he closes his eyes for a short moment). And then... I was sitting there [in the underground] and I was like (he closes his eyes again) 'okay, there's this fog, what's going on? What's going on here?' And then I just... (he lowers his voice and slows down his speaking to a calm and centered voice). I just said to myself 'okay, how you feeling?' And I was like: 'oh, my God. I feel awful'.*

Imraan re-opens his eyes, speeds up his tempo, and speaks louder once again.

**Imraan:** *and as soon as I felt that, the cloud lifted. It was so clear. But it was, it was this whole idea of this whole concept we have of good feelings and bad feelings. And how we often... (...) cut ourselves off from the bad feelings because they make us feel bad.*

"Aand...", Imraan prolongs the sound of his 'and' before he proceeds:

**Imraan:** *I remember walking into... the [workshop] room (...). It was right at the end of the warm-up (...) 45 minutes of warm up and I'm... walking in. (...) And (...) as soon as I walked in... I heard her [Andrea Juhan] say (...) 'yeah, and... find your pod'. And then I saw my two pod members looking around, and then they came to me, and I just... like... fell into their arms (Imraan bends his upper body and almost 'falls' towards the screen). And I was like, completely... ghrugh (he makes a gurgling sound with his throat while seemingly 'falling' towards the screen again). And they were holding me... (Imraan visibly brings his two arms towards his chest in a gesture that for me speaks of hugging and holding). And I just realized (...) I had this (...) amazing (...) support.*

Imraan underlines in this sense, at another point during the interview, how he understands *intimacy* to include more than only sexual intimacy. He stresses how he has "encountered intimacy in his past, as (...) it has to be something physical. And (...) [he] found that really... [one]-dimensional. So... [he] loved the different ways of... sharing intimacy with people [that emerged on the dance floor]." He thus seems to connect intimacy - at least in relation to his conscious dance and movement experiences - to a broader quality of unconditional presence and contact, emphasizing the dynamic of witnessing and how

moments that engaged witnessing on the dance floor could unfold “so much intimacy.” In this respect, Open Floor International defines witnessing as an art “based in presence, awareness [an open field of witnessing], attention [a focus on something specific] and non-judgment (Open Floor International 2017: 119),” which be directed towards another, a larger field, and/or towards oneself. It therefore unfolds as “a way of being that has no agenda for change (Open Floor International 2017: 119)” and that is a “generous offering of presence (Open Floor International 2017: 119).” In Imraan’s case, it appears that especially the elements of non-judgement and of not needing to change have in this context been crucial. It seems that especially these dynamics have emerged healing moments of intimacy for him on and off the dance floor. It thus connects back to the practice of radical acceptance previously discussed related to Marisu, which, as underlined, revolves around the process of accepting others and oneself exactly as they *are* (Brach 2003). It can hence help unfold further potentialities by tapping into the paradox of healing and transformation engaged; the simultaneous embracement of what *is* and an urge to transform.

In relation to the situation from the introductory Libido workshop, this two-fold movement of accepting what *is* and unfolding further possibilities seems in this context to be present through how Imraan expresses that he was able to radically accept himself feeling “awful.” This, in turn, helped him manifest a greater sense of clarity regarding “what’s going on,” which moreover made it possible for him to later share this “awful” with his pod. The intimacy of being witnessed - being seen through non-judgmental and ‘agendaless’ presence - is with this pertinent both as regards Imraan witnessing himself - “I just said to myself ‘okay, how you feeling?’ And I was like ‘oh, my God! I feel awful’ - and regards how he allowed his pod members to witness him - “and I just... like, fell into their arms. (...) And they were holding me... and I just realized, like, I had this... eh, amazing (...) support.” I can in this sense imagine how Imraan’s experience of being unconditional received by his pod was also

made easier by how he had just witnessed himself. Vice versa, an ongoing process of relating with himself in more non-judgmental ways would likely unfold easier anew after having been unconditionally received by his pod. Imraan hence appears to highlight a healing process of intimacy that evolves simultaneously from ‘within’ and ‘without’, emerging, exactly, as a deeply *co*-regulative endeavor (Badenoch 2017)

Moving with this further into the word ‘intimacy’, I highlight how it etymologically speaking connects to aspects such as ‘deepest’ and ‘innermost’ (Online Etymology Dictionary 2021). Furthermore, it associates with what is close rather than distant (Cambridge Dictionary 2021b). US American author and family-focused psychotherapist Virginia Satir adds how an interconnected process of ‘making contact’ involves strengthening the relationship with both oneself and others, including “each person in contact with himself or herself and each in contact with the other (Satir 1976: ‘Goals for Me’).” She describes in this respect the process of ‘making contact’ through a poem, highlighting how it involves seeing and being seen, hearing and being heard, touching and being touched.

I believe  
The greatest gift  
I can conceive of having  
from anyone  
is  
to be seen by them,  
heard by them,  
to be understood  
and  
touched by them.  
The greatest gift  
I can give  
is  
to see, hear, understand  
and to touch  
another person.  
When this is done  
I feel  
contact has been made (Satir 1976: 1<sup>st</sup> preliminary page).

What Satir brings attention to concerns in this regard the previously discussed ‘spacemoments of resonance’ (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 10). They are, as engaged, relational spacemoments that carry transformative potentials because they manifest the dynamics of seeing and being seen, hearing and being heard, touching and being touched. They hence involve an ‘inner-outer’ web of relational safety and connection, which makes it easier for embodied contact boundaries at work to attune themselves to each other and dynamically transform within the ‘inner-outer’ flow of their lives (see also Siegel 2011, Porges 2011). The process of ‘making contact’ that Satir poetically describes above emerges in this sense in line with such a ‘resonating spacemoment’ dynamic. It helps embodied wholes experience and *know* - in the holistic sense of the word - how others and themselves are and become embodied-relational processes of wholeness. Intimacy, hence, is a core practice for peaces, moving to touch a potentially transformative web where individuals and collectives can co-emerge a felt, embodied connection with both themselves and each other.

Imraan’s expression related to showing up and making contact with and as his “awful” during the introductory Libido workshop engages with this moreover an interconnected process of *vulnerability*. In chapter 2, I have discussed vulnerability as a key ingredient for peaces, being at “the core, the heart, the center, of meaningful human experiences (Brown 2012: 12).” It thus helps embodied wholes stay open for being changed by each other’s presences, supporting dynamic rather than static ways of co-living. An embodied fabric of peaces would in this context struggle to manifest without processes of vulnerability, as embodied peaces rely upon such a relational capacity to continuously create new and different homeostatic equilibriums both ‘within’ and ‘between’.

Brown highlights in this respect how one definition of vulnerability reads “capable of being [physically and/or emotionally] wounded (Brown 2012: 39 based on Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2021).” This capacity for woundedness is however not understood as a

weakness but as an affirmative ability to embody the process of being alive. Nonetheless, vulnerability can often be challenging to live because it encompasses aspects such as “taking risks - risks of self-disclosure, risks of change, risks of not knowing, risks of failing (Brantmeier 2013: 96),” the recognition that one can never have full control over one’s life (Koppensteiner 2020: 226), as well as the courageous commitment to, as best as one can, be present for both the ups and the downs of one’s life (Brown 2012: 2). In a previous text, I have out of these three perspectives above defined vulnerability as “the courageous daring to - as ‘simple’ as it sounds yet with the multiple imperfections it involves - showing up as, nothing more and nothing less, *human* (Tjersland 2022: 77. Emphasis in original).”

Brown furthermore emphasizes how vulnerability is particularly pertinent related to processes of “uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure (Brown 2012: 34).” In Imraan’s case, it is especially the dynamic of emotional exposure that appears to dance in the center of his process, as this dynamic seems to move at the core of what has unfolded risk and uncertainty for him on and off the dance floor. It includes, yet it is not limited to, the situation of daring to show up to himself and his pod with the “awful” that he felt during the introductory Libido workshop<sup>94</sup>. I highlight in this respect how a key element that appears to have helped Imraan emerge this capacity for vulnerability relates to how he has, especially through conscious dance and movement, been able to cultivate relational qualities that have helped both him and others co-unfold meaningful encounters where vulnerability and intimacy have been possible. Many of these relational qualities involve what Imraan calls processes of *authenticity*.

In relation to a 5Rhythms workshop in Berlin in 2007, Imraan explains how “more authenticity” could for him unfold because he was present in a space where both he and

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<sup>94</sup> Imraan also, as an example, expresses processes of vulnerability related how he, especially connected to his initial engagements with conscious dance and movement as a newcomer in London and on the dance floor, used to have “this really... crippling anxiety” where he experienced “difficult... issues speaking to people.” One of the ways that helped him transform this anxiety was in this sense to empathically and compassionately ‘challenge’ himself to “speak to at least one person... a new person” each time whenever he went to conscious dance and movement classes.

others could communicate in non-verbal rather than only verbal manners. This allowed them to share more “about how they’re feeling, what was happening, like, emotionally, what was going on.”

*Imraan: it [dance and movement] allowed me to connect to people without (...) needing to... say anything. Without needing to... (...) step into this... standard world we have where, like, 'so what's your name? What do you do?'*

Imraan shakes his head in a slight, almost unnoticeable manner.

*None of that actually mattered there. (...) And I felt these connections were so much more... (Imraan lingers with the word 'more' while he looks to the side as if to search for the next word to speak) authentic (Imraan looks straight into the camera while speaking his last word). And people would then... share about how they're feeling, what was happening, like, emotionally, what was going on...*

He draws his breath before adding:

*So, it really felt like... there was more authenticity.*

I have in this respect, in relation to Tamara, previously discussed authenticity as a process that associates with an emergence of soul; an imperfect, embodied, and relational sense of alignment that unfolds from ‘within’ yet that knows it is also ‘without’ (Sohmer 2020b, Koppensteiner 2020). Processes of authenticity thus involve a continuous intuition towards life-affirming ways to be, become, know, and relate that include both oneself and the surroundings. These processes furthermore interlink with vulnerability, as it is hard to emerge an authentic sense of self without also including the vulnerable places that one emerges (Sohmer 2020b). I consider in this regard the fact that Imraan highlights authenticity especially related to a dynamic of expressing his emotions with others - “share about how they're feeling (...) like, emotionally, what was going on...” - to be a manifestation for what has perhaps been the most vulnerable, and thus also most poignantly felt as authentic, dynamic to unfold within his ongoing ‘process of soul’. My broader understanding of authenticity has with this not changed, yet Imraan makes visible a lived example for how this process can be evolved. It is noticeably also present in the situation from the introductory

Libido workshop, as Imraan's vulnerable expression of his "awful" to himself and to his pod seems to manifest as such an authentic expression of embodied emotionality.

Vitality nevertheless, processes of authenticity do not because of this - as also touched upon related to Tamara - always need to be about expressing one's vulnerable emotions to others. On the contrary, it would be a harmful misunderstanding of what authenticity is. I highlight in this sense a core aspect. Neither authenticity nor vulnerability imply to 'let it all hang out' in all contexts, as they are both "based on mutuality and requires boundaries and trust (Brown 2012: 45)." There are thus "societal, cultural, even economic barriers to vulnerability (...) (McKenna and Brantmeier in Brantmeier and McKenna 2020: 8)," and expressing and sharing one's vulnerable emotions to everyone in all contexts might therefore not be helpful. Instead, it can "come at a price and sometimes the risks outweigh the benefits (McKenna and Brantmeier in Brantmeier and McKenna 2020: 8)." An authentic sense of vulnerability therefore includes to acknowledge, respect, and feel one's way into when, how, and to whom a vulnerable expression might or might not be life-serving. As Sohmer discusses related to her phenomenological inquiry into an authentic sense of self:

our understanding of the value and necessity of self-expression [in relation to authenticity] became more nuanced throughout the inquiry. Full expression as a rule was questioned, replaced instead by discernment and choice around when to 'come forward' or 'pull back'. Like the image of 'a flower opening and closing', we came to agree that the authentic self could be 'subtle' and 'cocoon-like' at times, and in this sense, not disclosing or expressing ourselves could also be authentic when it was a conscious choice (Sohmer 2020b: 11).

The last word that Imraan engages - *integrity* - becomes with this essential. According to Palmer, the word 'integrity' does not only refer to a so-called 'outward-looking' process associated with dynamics such as moral standpoints and principles but can also refer to a more 'inner' experience of feeling whole and complete as well as not feeling 'broken' (Palmer 2004: 8). In the Cambridge online dictionary, integrity is similarly defined as "the quality of being whole or complete (Cambridge Dictionary 2021c)." in addition to the more

‘outward-looking’ process mentioned. In Imraan’s case, I affirm how when he is talking about processes of integrity related to his conscious dance and movement experiences, it is the more ‘inner’ experience of wholeness, completeness, and ‘unbrokenness’ that he expresses. He articulates in this sense how integrity has been a “real big personal one for [him],” seemingly associating it with finding life-affirming ways to begin “speak[ing] the difficult things. (...) To... open up... and connect (...) and... making that [how he is feeling] matter.” With it, he can become clearer to himself and to others about how “[his] feelings matter, [his] needs matter, what's going on for [him] matters.” This dynamic is importantly also present in the situation from the introductory Libido workshop, as Imraan’s act of noticing and sharing his “awful” with himself and his pod is, I affirm, a process of making his feelings “matter.” Imraan expresses in this respect how one of the dynamics that has helped him unfold such a key process of integrity is a dynamic that he learnt from Andrea Juhan connected to the later Libido ongoing group that he joined. This dynamic revolves around the ability to differentiate ‘I feel bad’ from anything being wrong with ‘me’, ‘you’, or ‘us’.

*Imraan: Andrea [Juhan] really helped with this, because (...) people would... be in situations where they felt really bad. And then Andrea said ‘yeah... this happens a lot in relationship’. Like, I feel bad... so there must be something wrong with me... or there must be something... you’re doing, or there must be something wrong in the relationship. When actually... the reality is... I feel bad. Full stop. (Imraan pauses his words). And (...) there’s nothing more.*

He continues.

*And (...) I really loved this, because (...) it just opened up this... space where we could speak about... things when we felt bad. (...) I feel like... it allowed me to open up to this vulnerability. So again, vulnerability, the intimacy... the two things I was talking about (Imraan stops his words seemingly midway while he appears to be searching for the next words to speak) and... to be more... authentic about... who I am... (...) what are my boundaries, like state (...) my limits very clearly about things.*

Imraan seems with this to explicitly connect his process of integrity - making what is going on for him “matter” - to the dynamics of vulnerability, intimacy, and authenticity discussed. He articulates in this sense how an authentic ability to “state” his “boundaries” and “limits” with integrity co-unfolds with “the two things [he] was talking about [vulnerability



and intimacy].” He moreover weaves it all together through the “space where [he and others] could speak about... things when [they] felt bad,” re-emerging the ability to authentically express “difficult emotions” with others as a core and connective tread. I understand in this regard the process of integrity that Imraan articulates to, first, have been a vulnerable endeavor. I say this based on how difficult it appears to have been for Imraan to “state” his needs and emotions to others. Second, this process of integrity appears to have worked as a crucial dynamic of balance, helping Imraan express his emotions and needs in authentic ways that serve rather than harm his soulful sense of alignment. Integrity, therefore, can perhaps be seen as a process that dances on the other side of authenticity from where vulnerability dances. It manifests, in line with the *yin-yang* principle, as a creative ‘opposite’ of vulnerability yet an ‘opposite’ that also is and becomes vulnerability itself. Through, around, and in-between them both, moreover, dances a process of authenticity that through the dynamic interplay between and as both integrity and vulnerability emerges a process of intimacy; a life-affirming dance of contact with both oneself and the surroundings.

The intertwined endeavors of vulnerability, integrity, authenticity, and intimacy that Imraan engages do in this manner move within a dynamic web of balances. If one process is chronically neglected or avoided on the expense of another, imbalanced (and violent) expressions of relationality can easily emerge whereby individuals and collectives sway towards the one or the other extreme. This tendency towards a one-dimensional extreme is, I affirm, difficult to combine with an embodied process of peaces. It might therefore also be this essential insight that manifests as one of the core contributions of this interview encounter with Imraan. Imraan and I have in this sense *not* engaged a complete and all-encompassing discussion of interpersonal engagement and relational healing, but co-explored an imperfect healing dance that centers around “how to be vulnerable. How to be, um... authentic. (...) How to remain in integrity, (...) and, eh... intimacy, exploring intimacy in

different ways.” The concrete and embodied manifestations for how this healing dance has unfolded in Imraan’s life can thus serve as a lived example for how conscious dance and movement, including Open Floor, can potentially support an embodied fabric of peaces by engaging an interpersonal “path” that, as mentioned, “is a lot about healing.”

#### **4.4.5 Artistic-Like Expressions of Resiliency**

To in this context approach some form of ‘conclusion’ as regards this interview encounter with Imraan, I emphasize how there is a key aspect that for me stands out through what we have together co-engaged. It concerns how an embodied process of healing cannot manifest as a one-dimensional or linear endeavor but needs to involve an imperfect web that emerges relational dances on an ever-transforming basis. In other words, the healing journey that Imraan has shared can only be because it includes both himself and his surroundings within a multidimensional dance of co-becoming. The healing ‘goal’, hence, is not to be ‘perfectly fine’ but to emerge new and different manifestations of embodied agency, creativity, relationality, wholeness, and more. Especially yet not exclusively related to the contexts of structural (and physical) violence that Imraan expresses - yet also, I contend, related to ‘less structural’ contexts of trauma, suffering, and pain - such a procedural and relational approach is key. As stated, “the essence of trauma isn’t events, but aloneness within them (Badenoch 2017: 25).” Our ‘inner’ healing and transformation, therefore, cannot be seen apart from the healing and transformation that happen ‘around’ - as well as vice versa.

Perhaps some of my statements above can in this regard be better explained by highlighting the last verse of a poem that was given to me when I was myself moving through a difficult process of healing related to the long-term and challenging process of illness that, as mentioned, was suffered by my father before he passed away. This poem speaks to something profoundly deep within me, emerging as an embodied truth related to how painful

and deep-cutting processes of illness - such as, in my father's case, dementia - can be *both* for those who suffer them *and* for those who stand around and painfully witness their course.

The flowers of pain will  
never wither.  
They are transformed into a melody  
in the orchestra of eternity.  
A melody that  
wraps around the earth and belongs  
to Life (Lystad 2020: 86. Translated from Norwegian by author).<sup>95</sup>

For me, these 'flowers of pain that never wither' are undeniably real. There are multiple aspects related to my father's last years and his painful passing that will always hurt. At the same time, I know how the lived reality of these 'flowers of pain' does not imply a life sentenced to misery and suffering. Rather, as both Imraan and the phrases 'they are transformed into a melody' that 'wraps around the earth and belongs to Life' make visible, eternal 'flowers of pain' can also co-exist with and even be and become sources of healing, connection, and peaces. This transformative co-existence, however, needs to emerge within an imperfect and relational dance where both individuals and collectives can take responsibility for and partake in the work that is needed to manifest new life-affirming ways.

Lederach and Lederach argue in this context how individuals and communities that live and have lived within protracted conditions of violence - such as what Imraan is describing related to the apartheid-influenced context of his upbringing - often need to engage a continuous integration of painful, potentially traumatic, and often inexplicable experiences. It is hence a process that relies upon an "artistic-like expression of resiliency (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 227)" rather than upon a complete 'solution' and full understanding of what has happened and/or is still happening. It is in other words a relational endeavor that does not center around 'becoming perfectly fine' but that continuously - in

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<sup>95</sup> *Smertens blomster vil / aldri visne. / De forvandles til en melodi / i evighetens orkester. / En melodi som / omslynger jorden og hører / Livet til.*

empathic and compassionate manners - engages and transforms a ‘happened/happening’ and the lived consequences that this ‘happened/happening’ carries within the ongoing flow of individual and collective lives. An artistic-like expression of resiliency is with this an ‘unfinished’ and ‘procedural’ (Muñoz 2006) dance that moves with and beyond a ‘happened/happening’ into a process of transforming and unfolding new life-serving ways to co-be, co-become, co-know, and co-relate. According to Ditzel Facci:

healing (...) is neither a linear endeavor of getting rid of something, nor a rewind function to get back to a previous situation. (...) It involves looking into the current experience of memories derived from past facts, identifying what is there, acknowledging their presence, and investing intentionality in their transformation (...) Hence, it also allows going beyond, acknowledging the lived experience in the ensemble of what makes a human being, in a process that unveils her becoming: experiences make her, but she is not defined by those experiences, because the process fuels continuous transformation (Ditzel Facci 2020: 207-208).

I find in this sense that the interpersonal path of healing that Imraan articulates does seem to emerge as such an ‘artistic-like’ expression. It appears to unfold as an ever-transforming dance that makes visible a lived web of ‘inner-outer’ healing that cannot be fully grasped and analyzed yet that relies upon an aesthetic capacity for imperfection. ‘Aesthetic’ comes from Greek and means ‘apprehending through the senses (Lindström 2012: 167), connecting with an ability to be “sharp in the senses (Lederach 2005: 69)” and to emerge clarity through ‘seeing the bigger picture’. Aesthetic processes hence attempt to understand “things as a whole, not as pieces (Lederach 2005: 69)” and to be “responsive to *the pattern which connects* (Bateson 1979: 8. Emphasis in original).”

Artist Nicholas Wilton describes in this context how “art among all the other tidy categories, most closely resembles what it is like to be human. To be alive. It is our nature to be imperfect. To have uncategorized feelings and emotions. To make or do things that don’t (...) necessarily make sense (...) (Wilson quoted in Brown 2012: 136. Emphasis in original).” Discussing embodied healing as an artistic-like endeavor, therefore, helps underline how transformative dynamics often evolve as such an imperfect and paradoxical

web that includes consistencies *and* inconsistencies, clarities *and* ambiguities, preservation *and* new possibilities, beings *and* becomings in pasts, presents, and futures. It involves in other words diverse dances of ‘inner-outer’ relationality that transform and connect in visible and invisible ways. Importantly, this lived web of imperfect wholeness is not a problem to be solved but a deep acknowledgement of the embodied creativity and resiliency that healing is. It hence manifests similarly to how Tamara expresses her process of integrating her experiences of growing up in a country affected by civil war yet also “let go of that story a little bit as well, like, see it as a story and not (...) who [she is].” Furthermore, it unfolds in line with the paradox of healing and transformation previously discussed; the simultaneous acceptance of things as they are *and* an urge to transform.

One of the core potentialities that I see as being involved in conscious dance and movement practices as regards such healing processes revolves with this around an aspect that I have touched upon before. Conscious dance and movement, including Open Floor, can potentially support such healing processes because these practices tend to integrate, celebrate, and engage rather than reduce or avoid the paradoxical, relational, and multifaceted web that embodied existence is. Importantly furthermore, such a lived capacity for relationality, paradox, and multiplicity is not only relevant for processes of healing but also for how human wholes continuously unfold. The healing qualities that Imraan and I have co-engaged are therefore equally relevant for an embodied peace fabric at large. It includes dynamics related to being an embodied-relational peace worker/facilitator (Dietrich 2013: 12-13, Lederach 2005, Koppensteiner 2020), as well as dynamics related to engaging not only moments of healing, pain, and suffering but also the ongoing unfolding into further possibilities (Ditzel Facci 2020). In other words, the healing qualities that Imraan and I have together discussed are relevant *both* for healing *and* for the affirmative process of unfolding, which, from a perspective of paradox, are and become the same embodied web (Koppensteiner 2009: 175).

My engagement with this interview encounter with Imraan has in this respect been an attempt from my side to honor the artful and imperfect quality involved. Instead of trying to grasp all the nuances of every relational dynamic that he expresses, I have tried “to respect the essential mystery of life, so that my answer to questions is ‘I don’t know’, and this not knowing is a form of generosity (Sutherland in Friedman and Moon 1997: 3).” I have in other words offered my ‘not-knowing’ as a researcher to help co-unfold new and meaningful insights through bowing to rather than trying to control the mystery that healing is (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 144). I have out of this come to understand how the potentially healing possibilities involved in conscious dance and movement practices cannot manifest as a step-by-step guide but rather *requires* an imperfect engagement with a continuous healing dance.

To with this end my engagement with this interview encounter with Imraan, I emphasize how he at one point underlines how he has in fact learnt to embrace his life as an imperfect expression of art in this manner. He articulates how he has come to understand how he does not have “to change [him]self” but can instead engage a compassionate and empathic understanding, as well as ‘not understanding’, as regards what is present and moving with and within him without, importantly, “allowing it to (...) drive... [his] actions.”

*Imraan: and for me, this is one of the biggest things I've learned [through conscious dance and movement practices] (...) that... I don't need to change anything about myself. It's just more understanding... what's going on. And sometimes not even understanding... but... just... noticing when something's there.*

He inhales.

*But not allowing it to (...) to drive... my actions.*

Imraan and I have in this sense, throughout this subchapter, co-engaged a relational process of knowing that has centered around an interpersonal “path” that “is a lot about healing.” We have, amongst others, touched upon dynamics of structural (and physical) violence related to the apartheid-influenced context of Imraan’s upbringing, as well as the lived, embodied consequences that can unfold out of such potentially traumatic life

experiences. Furthermore, through looking at one concrete conscious dance and movement situation that Imraan has lived, we have together explored a conscious dance and movement path that has seemed to revolve around a dynamic of (wider) emotional expression through engaging “how to be vulnerable. How to be, um... authentic. (...) How to remain in integrity, (...) and, eh... intimacy, exploring intimacy in different ways.” I have in this respect, amongst others, come to understand how an interpersonal path of healing vitally *needs* to remain an imperfect endeavor, emerging as a paradoxical ‘inner-outer’ dance where processes of openness, contact, vulnerability, and intimacy move hand in hand with, for example, processes of (self)authenticity and (self)integrity. It therefore unfolds in line with an “artistic-like expression of resiliency (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 227)” where the ‘goal’ is not to become ‘perfectly fine’ or to fully grasp all what has happened and/or is happening but about continuously integrating ‘flowers of pain’ while *also* allowing new and different possibilities for embodied co-being, co-becoming, co-knowing, and co-relating to evolve. With this, I have interestingly also touched upon several key dynamics that, in new and different ways, (re)emerge related to the interview encounter with Rivi in the following.

#### **4.5 Rivi- (Re)Emerging (In)Spirited Processes of Soul<sup>96</sup>**

Rivi is a clear and lively Israeli Open Floor teacher in the beginning of her 50’s who lives near Jerusalem and who teaches Open Floor and the 5Rhythms practice in different places both inside and outside of Israel. She is one of the founding members of Open Floor International<sup>97</sup> and has been with the practice since its beginning. Moreover, she is a volunteer working member in the circle called ‘educational programs’, which

oversees and supervises content and delivery of all training for [Open Floor] teachers and the public, provides supervision and supports new trainers [teachers that hold official Open Floor International training programs], and redesigns curriculum based

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<sup>96</sup> Some of the direct quotes from this interview have been edited lightly related to formal aspects and for purposes of clarity. These editions have been made on the request from Rivi herself.

<sup>97</sup> See chapter 3.1 as regards what it implies to be a founding member of Open Floor International.

on 360 feedback to ensure high quality programming (Open Floor International 2018: 'Our People').

Rivi is with this a highly experienced Open Floor teacher who has been involved in the ongoing development of Open Floor from the start. This is an important yet not exclusive for reason why I have chosen to interview her for this research.

During our interview meeting, as well as in her self-written presentation on the Open Floor International webpage, Rivi highlights how her background in embodied practices is varied and extensive. She mentions for example a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre from Tel-Aviv University, which she graduated from “more than 25 years ago [in 1992] (Open Floor International 2018: 'Find a Teacher: Rivi').” She furthermore explains how she now teaches weekly dance classes for theatre students in the same university department. She states in this respect how “the most significant class and experience in [this] acting school” was for her “with a movement teacher” and how she out of amongst others this later decided to pursue a Master of Arts in Dance/Movement Therapy<sup>98</sup> at the Hahnemann University in Philadelphia, US. This was noticeably the place where dance and movement first “became (...) kind of (...) a healing art” for Rivi. She has in the aftermath of this master’s degree moreover worked as a dance/movement therapist in different settings and with different people, including in and with “psychiatric hospitals, out-patient mental health clinics and group homes, holocaust survivors and their adult children, and women dealing with cancer (Open Floor International 2018: 'Find a Teacher: Rivi').” Additionally, Rivi is trained as a group facilitator<sup>99</sup>, in Hakomi Body-Mind Psychotherapy<sup>100</sup>, and she has studied with Thomas Hübl (2020) who, amongst others, works with transgenerational dynamics of trauma in the context of holocaust.

Around 2008, Rivi stopped “working... in Dance/Movement Therapy clinically,” shifting instead to teaching the 5Rhythms practice after having trained to become a 5Rhythms

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<sup>98</sup> Dance/Movement Therapy is a form of therapy that uses dance/movement as the primary tool and method for the therapeutic process. See Chaiklin and Wengrower 2009 for more information.

<sup>99</sup> Rivi does not specify how and with whom she has trained as a group facilitator.

<sup>100</sup> Hakomi is a body-centered and mindfulness-focused approach to psychotherapy. See Weiss et al. 2015.



teacher with Gabrielle Roth (the creator of 5Rhythms). This occupational change took place while Rivi was moving back and forth between Israel and the US for some time. Rivi expresses in this regard how she resonated with the 5Rhythms practice from the first workshop that she attended. She was “completely taking [it] in” and “became... very engaged on that path [practicing and teaching the 5Rhythms]” from that point onwards. Some years later furthermore, in 2013/2014, her “beloved... teachers from 5Rhythms [including Kathy Altman, Lori Saltzman, and Andrea Juhan] turned to [her] and said ‘we’re gathering a pool of... teachers worldwide to... start something new’.” This ‘something new’ was Open Floor and, as Rivi phrases it, she has been “on board” with that (Open Floor) ever since.

On a personal level, Rivi is one of the two first Open Floor teachers who I met. It happened in Vienna, Austria in August 2016 when I was participating in what in Open Floor is called a *Ground Floor Lab*. This is an introductory workshop to the Open Floor curriculum, which all potential teachers-in-training need to attend before they can start the teacher-training program. It was also the first Open Floor experience that I lived. As one of the founding members of Open Floor International, Rivi was present during this introductory workshop as one of the two teachers who facilitated it. I remember in this regard how I was at this point not sure whether I wanted to start the Open Floor teacher-training or not. I was rather present to ‘check out’ if Open Floor was a practice that I could intuit potentials for peaces within. Vitality however, when I left the Ground Floor Lab, I left with a clear and grounded feeling regarding how I was indeed pulled towards Open Floor as a practice for peaces. I have therefore wondered: was it a coincidence that it was exactly Rivi who facilitated this first Open Floor experience that I lived? Next to myself, Rivi is after all the only other Open Floor teacher who I have explicitly heard mentioning the word peace related to her work. This is because she is, next to and along with teaching dance and movement, involved in the Israeli peace movement *Women Wage Peace* (2021). It is a women-led grass-

roots initiative that seeks to help bring about a mutually binding non-violent agreement between Israel and Palestine. In this context, Rivi describes how her peace activism is, amongst others, resourced by her practice as a dancer and mover (Diamond n.a).

Was it in this respect a gentle nod from life itself that it was Rivi who facilitated this first Open Floor experience that I lived? Was it a playful gesture to keep encouraging me to dance in an embodied direction of peaces that I had already started? Without knowing the intricacies of life's workings on me, I know how listening to Rivi talk *both* about teaching dance and movement *and* about engaging herself in initiatives of peace during this Ground Floor Lab encouraged me to see connections between the two fields even if they did not appear fully tangible to begin with. It hence supported me to later apply for the Open Floor teacher-training program, which I was accepted into, amongst others, because of this embodied peace focus that I carried. When I searched for Open Floor teachers to interview for this research, therefore, Rivi manifested as an obvious one to talk with. I had a strong feeling that she could highlight important experiences as regards the focus that I explore.

When Rivi and I meet for our online interview encounter, which happens on the morning of the first day of February 2021, it is in this sense the first time that we are encountering each other after the initial meeting in Vienna that we lived. I am therefore excited see Rivi again, curious to hear what she might share as regards her manifold dance and movement experiences. We meet via Zoom while Rivi is, at least in the beginning of our talk, sitting relaxed in the sofa of her living room with one leg curled up in front her chest. She has let her brown and curly long hair hang loose on the sides of her head, yet the huge 'DJ-style' headphones that she is wearing keeps it away from her face. She is moreover wearing a white sweater, a gray flowery scarf, and glasses.

Throughout talk, Rivi comes across as an alive and enthusiastic woman who is authentically engaged in the dance and movement experiences that she expresses. For

example, whenever she articulates dynamics that appear to have been especially impacted by her dance and movement practice, her face lights up with an expression that communicates deep appreciation and passion. She furthermore often conveys a heartfelt smile or laughter together with her sharing, and the intonation of her voice continuously unfolds as an alive and dynamic dance. Lastly, throughout our talk, Rivi is just as much ‘speaking’ her stories with her ever-moving body (especially her hands) as with her words alone.

Interestingly furthermore, I am present to observe how several so-called ‘disturbing’ dynamics emerge into and become part of our meeting. Amongst others, Rivi is at the beginning of our talk having trouble with her internet connection and therefore calls her husband to ask if she can get the room with the better connection. Her husband says yes, which makes then me be present to observe how Rivi keeps turning her head multiple times to see if her husband is coming downstairs. When he comes, we need to pause our conversation for a while as Rivi sets herself up anew. This time, she sits in a chair rather than in a sofa. Additionally, Rivi tells me before we start how one of her sons is sick that day. She thus needs to keep an eye on her phone in case her son needs anything. I am with this also present to observe how Rivi often casts a look at her phone throughout huge parts of our talk.

There are several other examples of such ‘disturbing’ dynamics that I can mention. The point is however not to highlight how these ‘disturbances’ are there but to emphasize the calm and natural way that Rivi keeps integrating them into our meeting. She receives them with lighthearted calmness rather than with frustration or worry, hence ultimately unfolding these ‘disturbances’ not as disturbances at all but as the creative flow of life embodied into our talk. I am with this left with a curious sensation regarding how there is more to this interview than what I can first intellectually grasp. It is almost as if there is a deeper meaning involved; a playful rendering from life concerning how one can always also dance, play, and

become one's way through a life filled with 'chaos', mystery, and 'messiness' even when it, as highlighted above, can at times manifests as multiple 'disturbances' along the way.

#### **4.5.1 Beyond (Only) Healing**

To with this commence my engagement with the interview with Rivi, I re-highlight an aspect already mentioned. It concerns how Rivi's dance and movement journey has not only unfolded through Open Floor but through three main dance and movement practices. They are Dance/Movement Therapy, the 5Rhythms practice, and Open Floor. I have in this sense stated how Dance/Movement Therapy was the practice where dance and movement first "became (...) kind of (...) a healing art" for Rivi. This is important to notice connected to how she furthermore expresses that conscious dance and movement (the 5Rhythms practice and Open Floor) could in turn move "beyond therapy" to touch different realms that move past processes of healing alone. These 'different realms' are neither more nor less significant than healing, yet they engage an expanded life focus that can directly touch processes such as, for example, inspiration, unfolding, creativity, and peaces.

Rivi expresses in this regard how conscious dance and movement (5 Rhythms and Open Floor) could for her touch "the one piece [she] was missing in Dance/Movement Therapy, which... was kind of the connection to spirit. (...) The whole... beyond (...) therapy, the whole... (...) ecstatic, trans... formative, transcendental experience." She hence formulates how the 5Rhythms and Open Floor could emerge *transrational* and *transpersonal* dynamics, with the pre-fix 'trans' signifying 'beyond' and/or 'through' (Daniels 2005: 11, see also Dietrich 2012). It therefore connotes realms that are more than only rational and more than only personal. During the interview, Rivi names this as "the magical ingredient... which is completely of soul and spirit," highlighting how being in touch with this 'ingredient' "[re]connected [her] to [her] essence, which, [has] (...) a lot of magic and (...) free spirit and (...) imagination and... creativity and expression."

Rivi does however, vitally, not exclude a dynamic of healing as being present within this transrational and transpersonal focus on “beyond therapy” that she carries. On the contrary, similarly to Imraan and Marisu, she uses at times the word ‘healing’ to describe how practicing conscious dance and movement has unfolded changes in her life. Moreover, as a clarification to her words after the interview has taken place, Rivi underlines how she considers processes of healing to happen both in therapy and in conscious dance and movement spaces. Yet, this healing dance takes different routes and expresses itself in different ways between the two fields. It is therefore in line with the previously argued notion regarding how Open Floor is not therapy even if it can carry healing and therapeutic potentials. In this respect, Rivi’s sharing during our interview encounter noticeably dances to emphasize what constitutes more than (only) processes of healing, emerging in line with what Koppensteiner calls an “affirmative practice for an active life (Koppensteiner 2009: 175).” It hence brings attention to how a practice such as Open Floor can be a resource for peaces not only in terms of transforming conflicts and/or supporting healing but also in terms of manifesting dynamics that are, in and by themselves, peaces. British drama and play therapist Dianne Gammage similarly highlights a holistic and life-affirming “awakening that encompasses the psychological, intellectual, physical, social and spiritual sphere, reminding us that life is more than just surviving: it is about thriving (Gammage 2017: 17).”

Rivi articulates in this context how she has importantly encountered this affirmative and “magical ingredient” of life through engaging transrational and transpersonal dynamics both in the 5Rhythms practice and in Open Floor. The qualities and facets of this ‘ingredient’ have however unfolded differently for her between the two practices. In the following, I commence with what she expresses related to the 5Rhythms before I discuss what she articulates related to Open Floor. First, however, I take a closer look at what these processes

that are “completely of soul and spirit” might imply, as both ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ are multifaceted words that can be understood in diverse and even, at times, disparate manners.

#### **4.5.2 Processes of Soul and Spirit**

In the Open Floor curriculum, embodied soul is understood as a process of wholeness that moves through and as each individual. It is a “capacity to explore, embody, and integrate layers of the self that are much deeper than personality (...) to explore our connection to the largest sense of Self (Open Floor International 2017: 18).” In an interconnected yet differently phrased vein, Koppensteiner builds on Perls’ (1973) humanistic gestalt approach to therapy to discuss soul as a meaningful whole and *gestalt* quality of a person. It is a “meta-pattern, a pattern that connects to other patterns - those of the body, heart, and mind (Koppensteiner 2020: 110).” It is thus a wholeness-oriented and integrating capacity that includes physical, emotional, and mental dimensions yet that is larger and beyond the coming together of these dimensions alone. It is hence not an anti-rational process but a transrational one, simultaneously encompassing and being more than what rationality emerges.

Soul is furthermore, in the Open Floor curriculum, understood as a process that both *is* and carries potentials to connect into a wider transpersonal field - a process of spirit. It therefore engages “the paradox of our oneness and our individual uniqueness (Open Floor International 2017: 18),” emerging as a “gateway, that which stands at the edge of the personal and reaches into the transpersonal (Koppensteiner 2020: 114)” *and* as spirit embodied. There is in this regard a vital clarification that I need to (re)highlight. I do not understand soul as a ‘disembodied’, individual-only entity that associates with a more Cartesian idea of soul<sup>101</sup> and/or with the religious/moral ideas that Descartes also based many of his reflections upon (see Skirry n.a, Hatfield 2014). Neither do I understand it as a more secular and embodied ‘core and essence’, which Hillman for example highlights when he -

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<sup>101</sup> As discussed, Descartes uses ‘mind’ and ‘soul’ rather interchangeably. A Cartesian idea of ‘soul’ is therefore similar to a Cartesian idea of ‘mind’. See chapter 2.2.

through his acorn theory - discusses how “you and I and every single person is born with a [unique] defining image (Hillman 2017: 11).” I rather, paradoxically, understand soul closer in line with a Buddhist ‘no soul’ - *Anātman* - which I say because I consider soul to ultimately unfold in line with what Hanh (2017) calls *interbeing*. Even though soul is experienced as a personally lived process, hence, it does *not* include a separate and independent ‘I’ (see also Epstein 1995). In connection with the final interview encounter with Lori, I return these notions of ‘no-soul’ and ‘interbeing’ in more depth.

I engage with this soul in the following as an *embodied, relational, and ever-changing* possibility that, in line with how I have earlier discussed ‘mind’, manifests as a process rather than as a noun (see Koppensteiner 2020: 108). A *process* of soul hence relates with the authentic sense of ‘inner-outer’ alignment previously discussed related to Tamara and Imraan, unfolding from a “place of authenticity and congruence when the personal self is aligned and in touch with the larger whole (Koppensteiner 2020: 184).” It therefore evolves as an ongoing “capacity to be at one with our deepest sense of self, with each other and the larger field, our environment, the natural world, and something much greater - the enormity of existence (Open Floor International 2017: 18).” This, I argue, is also in line with the understanding that Rivi engages, even if she often uses the noun-oriented phrase “my soul” (or even “my essence”) to verbalize her experiences.

A soulful process of ‘inner-outer’ alignment can with this never be willed or forced but needs to be allowed through an ever-changing manifestation of new dynamic balances (Koppensteiner 2020: 113). It thus associates with intuitive ways of knowing (Koppensteiner 2020: 111-114) and with the aesthetic qualities of art discussed related to Imraan. It therefore encompasses dynamics that respond to ‘the pattern that connects’ (Bateson 1979: 8) and that approach “things as a whole, not as pieces (Lederach 2005: 69).” Processes of soul involve in other words a key “propensity for depth, for a deeper and larger form of understanding

(Koppensteiner 2020: 114)” because an attentiveness towards patterns that connect can also unfold an understanding as regards how these patterns might move. In this regard, Lederach (2005) argues how peace work itself is a soul-based discipline. This is because one is as a peace worker often asked to engage aesthetic ways of knowing within complex realities of peaces and conflicts to emerge a clearer picture of the dynamics involved. Through aesthetic engagement, one can become “attentive to image. Listen for the core. Trust and follow intuition. Watch metaphor. Avoid clutter and busy-ness. See picture better. Find the elegant beauty where complexity meets simplicity. Imagine the canvas of social change (Lederach 2005: 74).” Peace work, therefore, is not foreign to soulful ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating but rather deeply relies upon these processes to unfold authentic possibilities for transformation and change.

As a final aspect to highlight, Koppensteiner (2020) engages insights from the 5Rhythms practice and the rhythm called ‘lyrical’<sup>102</sup>. According to Roth (1998ab), lyrical is an expression of soul. Koppensteiner describes in this respect lyrical as “the celebration of the human condition as an ever-shifting play of patterns. (...) The uplifting moment of joy that comes from realizing the world as an ongoing process of differentiation and integration (Koppensteiner 2020: 110).” In a similar vein, I emphasize soul as an *affirmative* endeavor, moving as a celebration of wholeness that encompasses, in a *yin-yang* manner of paradox, the ‘parts’ and the whole, the pains and the joys, the peaces and the conflicts. It therefore emerges as a capacity to joyfully, compassionately, and empathically - depending on what is needed within unique contexts and moments - affirm and engage life both when it ‘falls apart’ (Chödrön 2017) and when it unfolds moments of peaces. It thus includes dynamics of radical acceptance and non-judgment (Brach 2003), playfulness, joy, and creativity (Gammage 2017), wisdom (Palmer 2004), as well as empathy and compassion

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<sup>102</sup> Lyrical is the fourth rhythm in the 5Rhythms process. It manifests as a dance of fluidity and lightness where “(...) we realize we are works-in-progress. Nothing is fixed, particularly our identities (Roth 1998b: 156).” Lyrical hence associates with, amongst others, dynamics of authentic joy, playfulness, and creativity.



(Koppensteiner 2020, Gilbert 2009). Yet, it never includes indifference, as the phrasing *embodied* soul rather suggests an intimate engagement with the embodied realities that life evolves. In this regard, US American Buddhist teacher and nun Pema Chödrön describes how wellbeing, authentic cheerfulness, and relaxation can emerge from courageously daring to embody life in its multiplicity. She hence describes, I contend, a soulful capacity to affirm life through and within its manifold manifestations.

Sometimes we meet someone who seems to have a great sense of well-being. And we wonder how that person got that way. (...) That well-being is often a result of having been brave enough to be fully alive and awake to every moment of life, including all the lack of cheer, all the dark times, all the times when the clouds cover the sun. Through our own good spirit, we can be willing to relate directly with what's happening, with precision and gentleness. That's what creates fundamental cheerfulness, fundamental relaxation (Chödrön 2017: 187).

Chödrön guides with this my discussion over to the second process that I want to engage. It is the process of spirit, which Rivi refers to together and along with processes of soul during our interview encounter. Chödrön mentions in this respect 'our own good spirit' above. I see this as an expression for how closely related soul and spirit are. 'Our own good spirit' can in this sense be seen as an expression for how soul might be experienced as a personally lived - 'our own' - manifestation of spirit, yet how spirit is always embedded in this soulful experience that one lives. Koppensteiner similarly contends how "spirit is a different name for the transpersonal self, for the whole that is larger than the human being, yet flows through it, equally sublates and hosts it (...)" (Koppensteiner 2020: 114)."

Open Floor International understands spirit as a collective, indefinable, and wider process of wholeness, of life, and of source. It is "a deep, embodied connection with all of existence and a sense of profound acceptance of life exactly as it is (Open Floor International 2017: 22)," which "elicits a peace that comes from the awareness and connection with something larger than our skin-encapsulated self (Open Floor International 2017: 22)." Processes of spirit hence dance beyond a personally lived experience of soul, yet a personal

experience of soul always also is and becomes part of this process of spirit. In this regard, spirit is in the Open Floor curriculum defined as a ‘relational hunger’ (Open Floor International 2017: 22). It implies that it manifests through a relational rather than a so-called ‘inner’ and personal realm, yet, because “relationship is not something we do - it is something we are (Open Floor International 2017: 19),” this relational process is always also ‘inner’ and personal. Spirit, thus, is a paradox. It moves ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, simultaneously *being, unfolding, and connecting into* an ever-unfolding dance of wholeness.

Looking with this at a participatory understanding of spirit as highlighted by US based Spanish psychologist Jorge N. Ferrer (2002, in Hart et al. 2000), I emphasize how a paradoxical understanding is key when approached from an embodied perspective. Ferrer contends how a subtle Cartesian-inspired bias is present in much transpersonal theory (see also Sohmer 2020a) connected to the idea that spirit is an exclusively ‘inner’ realm that unfolds through individual experiences, which, for the main part, lie ‘outside’ of oneself. Ferrer calls it the experiential approach to transpersonal phenomena and argues how it fails to sufficiently integrate embodied-relational realities. It can with this lead to spiritual narcissism - “*the misuse of spiritual practices, energies, or experiences to bolster self-centered ways of being* (Ferrer in Hart et al. 2000: 220. Emphasis in original)” - as well as to a lack of integrating transpersonal processes into everyday life (Ferrer in Hart et al. 2000: 222-223).

Welwood furthermore adds how this neglect of embodied-relational realities can manifest spiritual bypassing. It is the tendency to “use spiritual practice to bypass or avoid dealing with certain personal or emotional ‘unfinished business’ (Welwood 2002: 11).” Sohmer emphasizes in turn how such a ‘disembodied’ approach can disconnect transpersonal processes from social engagement and hence render them ‘raised above’ embodied life (Sohmer 2020a: 88-91). She moreover argues how an interconnected tendency to universalize transpersonal processes by assuming that they are experienced in the same or similar way by

all individuals and groups can lead to a lack of cultural diversity. It happens because one neglects how “cultural influences and social positionality shape the way that individuals perceive and participate with the transcendent and imminent world (Sohmer 2020a: 85).” This can in turn be seen in connection to what Koppensteiner names a strong notion of spirit, which, amongst others, builds on Hegel (1977), Wilber (2000), and Huxley (2004) to argue how spirit represents a so-called ‘universal’ culmination of a one-directional journey that continuously moves towards ever ‘better’ and ‘higher’ integrations. In difference from this, Koppensteiner proposes how spirit is an open umbrella term “that signify a polymorphous plurality rather than a single reality (Koppensteiner 2020: 115).” It is thus, more poetically phrased, nothing more and nothing less than “the integration of the pattern of the individual dancer into the larger aesthetics of the dance (Koppensteiner 2020: 114).”

Ferrer’s participatory vision of spirituality understands with this how transpersonal phenomena are not ‘disembodied’, de-contextualized, or individual-only but ‘multilocal participatory events’ (Ferrer 2002: 116). It implies that individuals and groups, rather than *having* spiritual experiences, co-participate as embodied-relational beings in spaces and times where processes of spirit unfold. These participatory events are moreover multilocal because “they can occur not only in an individual, but also in a relationship, a community, a collective identity, or a place (Ferrer 2002: 119).” I emphasize in this respect how I understand processes of spirit in line with such a participatory approach. I therefore focus upon the embodied-relational potentials for *transformation* that they carry, building on Ferrer to argue how most spiritual traditions do not consider the ‘goal’ of spiritual practice to be to have a spiritual experience but to co-participate in the “spiritual transformation of self, relationship, and world (Ferrer 2002: 126).” I hence aim to engage an approach to spirit that is in “alignment with [this] spiritual quest [of transformation] (Ferrer 2002: 131).”

When it comes to endeavors of knowing that are involved in spirit, I underline the knowing that “emerges through the experiential recognition of the cosmos and the human being as enfolded in each other. (...) The experiential recognition of larger patterns, archetypical formations, deeper symmetries (Koppensteiner 2020: 115).” Koppensteiner names it ‘witnessing’, yet highlights how it is, in difference from the relational ‘inner-outer’ process of witnessing that I have discussed related to Imraan, a ‘non-localized’ (Hart in Hart et al. 2000: 37) form that arises “neither outside nor inside, nor relationality in-between (Koppensteiner 2020: 116).” It therefore associates with the Sufi poet Jalal-ad-Din Muhàmmad Rumi’s image of the “way between voice and presence where information flows (Rumi quoted in Barks 1997: 32),” which opens up through a “disciplined silence (Rumi quoted in Barks 1997: 32).” It is thus a form of witnessing that emerges as an open, present state of awareness, allowing a larger, *nonrational* form of understanding to evolve.

#### **4.5.3 Like an IV to my Soul**

Moving with this, to begin with, to Rivi’s soulful and spirited experiences with and through the 5Rhythms practice, I highlight how she expresses a reconnection with and renourishment of what she names “my soul”. She furthermore connects it to an experience of feeling “free spirited” (again), highlighting how the 5Rhythms practice helped her reconnect with a wider transpersonal field - “the magical ingredient”, “the connection with spirit,” “the whole (...) ecstatic, trans... formative, transcendental experience.” With this, she underlines how soul and spirit dance together. In addition, she articulates a core imbalance that seems to previously - before she started to engage conscious dance and movement - have been present in her life, which made it difficult for her to unfold the soulful and spirited processes that she expresses. This imbalance seems to relate to how she did not earlier encounter enough space and time in her everyday existence to sufficiently affirm and nourish a process of “soul.” Correspondingly, she could not sufficiently nourish and engage a wider, spirited field of

“magic”. Rivi articulates in this sense how she used to feel that “[her] soul was suffocating” due to the stresses that she experienced from “life in Israel in general” as well as from being “a young mother of two very intense boys.” She uses in this regard the phrase “like an IV [intravenous] to my soul” to describe how relieving and helpful the 5Rhythms practice was because it, noticeably, brought “back... magic into [her] life.”

*Rivi: I was a young mother of two very intense boys... living kind of in a remote area in Israel. A lot of stress of life in Israel in general and life as a young mother (...) It was just... like...*

“Ah,” Rivi exhales with a noticeable sound while bringing one of her hands to her throat.

*Rivi: I felt like my soul was suffocating (...) I literally felt like my soul was suffocating. (...) I wasn't in my bloom. I was just*

At the end of this sentence, Rivi speaks to me through her physical body rather than through her words. She raises her shoulders, contracts her upper body, and puts one of her hands in front of her chest while pushing against the area of her lungs and her heart. I can literally sense the words ‘tight’ and ‘contraction’ emerging out of her bodily speaking.

*Rivi: and when I found (Rivi releases her hand, shoulders, and upper body again) that... practice [5Rhythms] ... it was just like (...) an IV [intravenous] to my soul. (...) I remember saying... I was talking to a friend (...) about what it [5Rhythms] gave us and I said ... ‘for me it brought back magic... into my life’. Like the magical ingredient... which is completely of soul and spirit.*

I emphasize in this respect two main dynamics that emerge out of Rivi’s sharing above. First, there is an element of (lack of) breath that is visible related to the word ‘suffocating’ as well as related to how Rivi’s bodily speaking and placement of her hand on the throat and her chest seems to articulate aspects connected to ‘contraction’ and ‘tightness’. Second, Rivi brings in my understanding attention (back) to the process of peaces as an everyday web - previously touched upon especially related to Tamara and her lived “practice of slowing down” within her academic work environment. I say this because Rivi helps highlight how homeostatic imbalances can occur not only through huge, violent, and/or traumatizing experiences but also through ‘smaller’ and everyday dynamics of (chronic) stress and day-to-day demands. The experience of being a mother seems in this respect to be particularly important, seeing as Rivi returns to this experience at several points throughout

our meeting. Nonetheless, Rivi does not communicate an overly challenging or ‘out of the normal’ family situation but conveys deep appreciation and affection whenever she speaks about her family. At the same time, she highlights the stresses that can accumulate out of, for example, the responsibilities and demands involved in parenthood. In the following, I discuss these two main dynamics that Rivi expresses.

#### **4.5.4 Breathing (Self)Connections and the Everyday Practice of Embodied Peaces**

Starting with the former dynamic involved, I re-highlight how Rivi appears to articulate an element of (lack of) breath related to her use of the word ‘suffocating’ as well as related to how she places her hand on her throat and her chest - the place of her lungs - and non-verbally expresses aspects connected to ‘tightness’ and ‘contraction’ in relation to these parts of her body. Interestingly furthermore, her bodily language seems to shift instantly again when she starts explaining about the 5Rhythms practice, relaxing her upper body and giving out the impression that there is more space to breathe anew. I recall in this sense back how I have previously discussed soul as a meaningful process of wholeness that emerges through an experience of alignment and balance (Koppensteiner 2020). The aspect of how Rivi articulates a process of “soul” that “was suffocating” can in this context be seen as a literal and metaphorical expression for how the ‘lack of air’ - the limited time and space that she had to, which she expresses at another point, “even nourish... [her]self... in any (...) domain” - made it difficult for her to connect with and express this wholeness-oriented process of soul. Consequently, she found it difficult to connect with and express a larger “magical ingredient” of life. In this respect, Koppensteiner affirms how breath is a ‘great connector’. It “does not just sustain our body, heart and mind with life, touch soul, connect the interpersonal and intrapersonal, it also inspires us (Koppensteiner 2020: 114).” Breath, thus, relates with *intrapersonal* processes of embodied self-connection, *interpersonal* processes of ‘inner-outer’ existence, as well as with *transpersonal* processes of spirit (see also

Fogel 2009, Hart in Hart et al. 2000). In the following, I focus on the embodied self-connection that this process evolves, especially as it relates to the second dynamic that Rivi emphasizes above - the element of peaces as an everyday practice and fabric.

Fogel emphasizes how (chronic) stress is a “condition that results when the body is unable to achieve homeostatic balance (Fogel 2009: 142).” A long-term experience of such imbalance can in this sense grow into larger overwhelmed states that are felt similarly to trauma dynamics. It is therefore helpful to, if possible, engage a practice of constantly unfolding new dynamic ways rather than waiting for imbalances to grow overpowering and huge. It is with this comparable to how I have discussed embodied peaces in this inquiry, manifesting as a continuous practice of homeostatic engagement (see Dietrich 2012, 2013, 2018, Echavarría Alvarez et al. 2018, Koppensteiner 2020, Ditzel Facci 2020, Tjersland and Ditzel Facci 2019). Importantly nevertheless, since balances and imbalances move within an ever-transforming web, transformation can always occur no matter how deep the imbalances have grown. This lived practice of homeostatic (re)unfolding can in this regard be facilitated through a two-fold process that involves 1) (re)connecting to embodied self-awareness and thus *notice* that imbalances are present, and 2) finding ways to *(re)unfold* new homeostatic equilibriums through and with the embodied whole (Fogel 2009: 142-144). In this respect, seeing as “psychophysiological health rests upon the ability to mindfully perceive and monitor bodily states (Fogel 2009: 22),” the process of breathing becomes essential.

Breath is a unique process of embodied wholeness because it is “partly automatic and partly voluntary (Fogel 2009: 228).” One can therefore focus on breath, first, to become aware of how one’s life-sustaining breathing dance always already, without effort, is going on, hence *experiencing* one’s current existence and *notice* that one is alive and what one is living by “tuning into, localizing, and identifying [one’s] current **biobehavioral** response mode (Fogel 2009: 241. Emphasis in original).” Vitally therefore, focusing on breath can

help one identify what is in a current state of imbalance and help one understand what might be needed to emerge a different sense of balance anew. Second, a focus on breath can, to a certain degree, help one change the breathing pattern itself and with this (partially) co-influence one's embodied-relational dance (Fogel 2009: 227-268). It involves to co-influence the current activation of the nervous system and thus the ever-transforming flow of one's emotional existence (van der Kolk 2014, Badenoch 2017). Ditzel Facci highlights in this respect how this two-fold process of breathing can help co-evolve a possibility to engage the before-discussed tendency to 'think oneself apart', as the practice of "concentrating on breathing makes it possible to imbue mind in the body (...) (Ditzel Facci 2020: 169)." Said differently, bringing mindful attention to breath can help make visible how the manifold processes of embodied wholeness move and unfold together.

I emphasize in this context how the process of breathing also intertwines with a felt sense of safe/not safe enough (Fogel 2009: 234, van der Kolk 2014). It thus associates with the polyvagal theory (Porges 2011, 2017) and the window of tolerance/presence (Siegel 2011, Open Floor International 2017: 133) previously discussed, as breath both influences and is influenced by whether the survival system or the social engagement system is activated. Fogel argues in this respect how effortful breathing tends to occur when the embodied whole senses a situation as threatening and therefore activates the body to be ready for action (Fogel 2009: 235). This form of breathing is hence life-affirming in certain situations, yet it can also embed in chronic manners out of, for example, long-term stress or trauma dynamics. 'Stuck' patterns of breathing deplete in this sense the embodied whole of energy, vitality, and power, often manifesting as chronic muscle tensions and/or restricted breathing patterns that perpetuate the trauma/stress cycle (Fogel 2009: 234). At the same time, since breathing can to a certain extent be voluntarily influenced, the conscious engagement of breath can, as mentioned, be used to help restore new dynamic equilibriums.



According to van der Kolk, breathing is one out of three bottom-up ways that can help modulate the threat assessment system; the other two being movement and touch (van der Kolk 2014: 64). By practicing a slowing down and relaxation of breath, therefore, one can help (re)emerge a sense of safe enough. Vice versa, by encountering situations where the social engagement system and a felt sense of safe enough can be activated, the breathing cycle can be helped to slow down and relax. It does not mean that breathing is a ‘quick fix’ to chronic patterns of trauma or stress but that a conscious relationship with and engagement of breath can support new dynamic equilibriums and embodied processes of co-regulation.

Looking with this at how Rivi communicates a process of “soul” that “was suffocating,” which, as mentioned, has amongst others emerged out of the stress “of life in Israel (...) and life as a young mother,” I notice how this co-regulative process involved in breathing is key. It is true whether it happens through a conscious relationship with breath or not. If a process of soul evolves out of a dynamic sense of balance and alignment, it can be hard to emerge this process when one is, as Rivi expresses it at another point, “overstretched and stressed out.” Palmer argues in this regard how a process of soul ‘is shy’. It is “like a wild animal (...) [it] is tough, resilient, resourceful, savvy, and self-sufficient: it knows how to survive in hard places. (...) Yet despite its toughness, the soul is also shy. Just like a wild animal, it seeks safety in the dense underbrush (...) (Palmer 2004: 52).” Leaning upon this metaphor, one might say that a process of soul easily ‘goes into hiding’ if circumstances and conditions are not affirmative for this process to emerge. It can happen out of ‘larger’ dynamics of trauma or violence, yet, as Rivi highlights, also out of ‘smaller’, everyday dynamics of stress and insufficient time to “even nourish.... [one]self... in any (...) domain.”

Rivi emphasizes in this respect how she, before she started to engage conscious dance and movement practices, “didn't have... a tool... (...) when [she is] (...) overstretched and stressed out. [She] didn't have a tool... to say ‘now I'm going to do that’ [do something to

restore a dynamic sense of balance].” 5Rhythms and Open Floor provided her in this sense with such a tool that helped her practice new embodied ways to keep nourishing her process of “soul”. As Rivi expresses it: “with 5Rhythms (...) and... later with Open Floor, it's like... I'm going to dance. But not just dance, (...) my body is going to dance (...) my emotions are going to dance, my mental, you know (...) I'm going to do the meditation. So it's (...) an actual tool for everyday life.” I ask in this context Rivi at another point if she has also “experienced... challenges with (...) conscious dance [and movement]? (...) a limit of the practice, (...) [that it] can't help [her] here, or... this... has maybe... been unhelpful even?” As one answer to this question - after having underlined for me that “in no way did it [conscious dance and movement]... not do good” - she articulates how she, “in the first... couple years of practice,” experienced “kind of the painful gap between the time a workshop ends and the magic and... (...) going back to life.” It therefore took her “a while (...) for the fluidity to happen between... workshop space and life space.” She thus emphasizes the crucial element of *practice*, highlighting how “in any spiritual practice they talk about practice, and every day and... doing it in life.”

One day, therefore, Rivi had “a breakthrough with it [the practice of integrating dance/movement and life].” It happened while she was dancing 5Rhythms at home by herself and then, in the middle of her dancing, got a call from her son’s school telling her that “your son is with a stomachache, you have to come get him.” Rather than becoming stressed and/or frustrated about her interrupted dancing, Rivi ‘simply’ “picked up [her] keys, and (...) went to the car (...) And [she] thought ‘oh (...) this is... progress (...) it's not like (...) oh! argh! (...) my... dance was ruined, my meditation is gone.” Rather, she experienced a centered “oh, okay. Yeah, that's... part of the dance” and “the spirit of [the dance] (...) totally carried [her]... into the day, into real life.” It thus emerges comparable to how I have described

certain dynamics of our interview itself, manifesting as a lighthearted dance that can integrate rather than deny the so-called ‘disturbances’ that life also brings.

When I furthermore ask Rivi about how this dance/movement-life integration “kind of slowly trickled in” for her, she explains how it emerged through three core dynamics. They are: 1) re-connecting to a meaningful process of wholeness *on* the dance floor 2) bringing that reconnection into her everyday *off* the dance floor life, and 3) engaging conscious dance and movement as an ongoing (spiritual) practice to keep emerging this lived sense of wholeness *on* and *off* the dance floor anew. She hence emphasizes a process of integration that, amongst others, relates back to the liminal spaces discussed connected to Gunvor. It concerns, as mentioned, how conscious dance and movement practices contain liminal potentials to open, expand, and twist ‘usual’ ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating because they are also ‘set apart’ from daily life (Schirch 2005). Paradoxically therefore, precisely because conscious dance and movement practices were in the beginning a bit ‘set apart’ for Rivi - unfolding a “painful gap” between “the magic of the workshop” and “the... annoyances of life” - it might have helped her encounter a space that was safe enough, different enough, open enough, and bounded enough to begin practicing new and different ways to manifest dynamic equilibriums also *off* the dance floor. It might amongst others have happened because conscious dance and movement practices are also not ‘set apart’ but symbolic mirrors and lived examples for what can happen/is already happening *off* the dance floor.

The previously discussed notion of soul as a process that cannot be forced or willed but needs to be emerged through an ongoing process of new homeostatic engagement re-emerges with this as vital. According to Palmer (2004), a process of soul can be facilitated in ‘circles of trust’ where the relationships present are neither invasive nor evasive but combine an attitude of care with patience, unconditional acceptance, and abilities to listen more than one speaks and/or gives unsolicited advice. The ‘shy soul’ does however *not* easily emerge in

spaces that are either too pushy or stressed, or that lack the quality of care. In this sense, the dynamic of Open Floor as a facilitated practice re-emerges as crucial, bringing attention to how Open Floor can also help ‘enable’ (Koppensteiner 2020: 170) ‘circles of trust’ where empathy, care, acceptance, and more can be more easily embodied and lived. Imraan, I believe, has already highlighted an example for how such a soul-friendly space can be manifested related to a conscious dance and movement “path” that is “a lot about healing” and that centers around “how to be vulnerable. How to be (...) authentic. (...) How to remain in integrity, (...) and, eh... intimacy, exploring intimacy in different ways.”

Koppensteiner underlines in this respect how one of the core resources involved in soul relates to how it can help unfold abilities to listen without expectations or conditions in this manner. It therefore allows for an attuned quality of presence that invites larger patterns of wholeness to emerge. With this, it can manifest as an affirmative experience of “aliveness, encompassing presence and contact with those around (...) (Koppensteiner 2020: 236),” bringing attention to what is one of the core resources involved in soul when it comes to peaces. Through its ongoing potentials for presence, aliveness, and contact, processes of soul can help manifest capacities to ‘simply’ be (with) instead of trying to ‘control’, distract from, and/or rationalize life’s many ‘disturbances’. It can with this also help peace workers, conflicting parties, participants/students, facilitators, researchers, and more, open up *both* towards life-affirming capacities for awe, inspiration, joy, creativity, and playfulness *and* towards life-affirming capacities for (self)empathy and (self)compassion. It therefore manifests as relevant for all forms of peace work, including peace work that focuses on healing, reconciliation, and/or conflict transformation *and* peace work that, in and by itself, emerges embodied potentialities for aliveness, presence, joy, inspiration, and peaces.

#### 4.5.5 The Vitalizing Dance of Inspiration

Building upon this final sentence above, I re-engage some of the words/phrases that Rivi uses to describe how reconnecting with and renourishing a process of “soul” on the dance floor has also (re)emerged other qualities in her life. She voices, as mentioned, “the magical ingredient”, “magic,” “free spirit,” “creativity,” “expression,” “connection with spirit,” “imagination,” as well as “the whole ecstatic, trans... formative, transcendental experience.” Moreover, whenever I witness her talk about these dynamics during our interview encounter, I notice an embodied movement of spaciousness, aliveness, vibrancy, and presence seemingly arising within and through Rivi. My attention is with this brought (back) towards how Open Floor and other forms of conscious dance and movement practices can potentially be a resource for peaces not only in terms of unfolding healing and/or conflict transformation but also through being an “affirmative practice for an active life (Koppensteiner 2009: 175).” This affirmative element becomes especially visible through the verbal and more-than-verbal elements of magic, vibrancy, aliveness, and more that Rivi expresses, bringing attention towards a key process that in many ways combines the re-unfolded ‘space to breathe’ that Rivi communicates in relation to her “soul” that “was suffocating” and the life-affirming field of “magic” that she also mentions. What I believe I can witness arising within and through Rivi’s verbal and more-than-verbal sharing is in this sense the vitalizing dance of *inspiration*.

Breath is in this regard, in addition to being a dynamic that relates with embodied processes of self-connection, also a dynamic that associates with spirit. ‘Breath’ and ‘spirit’ even carry shared origins in many languages, which is visible in English through the word ‘inspiration’ itself (Fogel 2009: 241). ‘Inspiration’ relates to a physical activity of breathing *and* to a process of being ‘breathed into’, ‘filled’, or ‘inflamed’ (by a larger whole) (Hart in Hart et al. 2000: 32, Koppensteiner 2020: 114). In my mother tongue Norwegian, there is similarly the word *åndedrett*, which is often used in medical settings to refer to breath yet that

also carries the word ‘spirit’ (*ånd*) in it. Put together with *drett*, which etymologically refers to ‘pulling’ or ‘a pull’ (Det Norske Akademis Ordbok 2022), *åndedrett* can thus, literally translated, be said to denote ‘being pulled by spirit’ or ‘pulling spirit in’ (through breath).

US American professor of transpersonal psychology Tobin Hart describes in this respect inspiration as an ‘epistemic event’ - an instance of knowing - that “fill us and move us, providing a kind of psychological and spiritual sustenance (Hart in Hart et al. 2000: 31).” He moreover adds how it unfolds through and as three broader phenomenological qualities, which are: contact and connection, openness and receiving, clarity and vibrancy. These qualities get in turn “embodied into *form* and/or *being* (Hart in Hart et al. 2000: 33. Emphasis in original). ‘Contact and connection’ refers in this sense to a felt shift in the experience of oneself, expanding ‘outwards’, ‘inwards’, down, and/or up to become “a connected, present, and aware participant (Hart in Hart et al. 2000: 35).” It thus involves an expansion, softening, and at times even dissolution of fixed self-boundaries. ‘Openness and receiving’ refers to a sense of ‘being filled’ or ‘flowed through’ by a wider, nonrational form of understanding that is non-localized and therefore emerges simultaneously from without, beyond, and within. It is with this an “opening to an awareness, a state of being that existed all along - (...) a veil being lifted or a crack in our consciousness that allows us to receive a shaft of illumination (Hart in Hart et al. 2000: 37).” ‘Clarity and vibrancy’ refers in turn to inspiration as an instance of enlivened insight and understanding; a ‘flash’ of non-linear clarity that reveals expanded perspectives and layers that have previously appeared ‘hidden’ (Hart in Hart et al. 2000: 38-41). Out of this, inspiration can, as mentioned, embody into *form* - a solution, an insight, or an answer to a problem/question - and/or into a felt shift and change in ways of *being*, which bring individuals and collectives in closer “alignment with what [they] recognize as most important (Hart in Hart et al.: 40).” As such, inspiration can be both *informative* and *transformative* (Koppensteiner 2020: 119).

In a similar vein, US American professors of psychology and psychological sciences Todd M. Thrash and Andrew J. Elliot highlight three main characteristics related to how inspiration unfolds. They emphasize *motivation* (energization and direction of behavior), *evocation* (inspiration arises through meaningful moments rather than through being willed and/or ‘random’), and *transcendence* (a sense of moving beyond ‘ordinary’ limitations and preoccupations) (Thrash and Elliot 2003: 871). Combining this with the perspective of Hart, I underline how inspiration is a felt sense of *presence*, *aliveness*, and *vibrancy* that emerges through a widened experience of *contact* - with oneself, the surroundings, and/or with life/‘something larger’ - which in turn manifests affirmative potentials for *transformation and change*. One of Hart’s interviewees describes in this regard how inspiration provides “the energy to move forward (quoted in Hart in Hart et al. 2000: 41).” This forward-moving energy is however not about avoiding the here and now but about rooting deeply into the current moment as means to be fully present for what *is* and for what can become.

I consider in this respect the animating and life-affirming force of inspiration to be crucial when it comes to peaces. This is because I understand the experience of ‘unpeace’ not to be conflicts per se but the absence of the movement that allows conflicts to unfold into peaces and peaces to unfold into conflicts anew. Conflicts, thus, are but relational energy. They emerge not out of a lack and of care and engagement but because people care and engage themselves deeply. Conflicts (not violence) are “a vital gift to every human context. [And] peace work is the art of constructively applying this gift’s creative energy (...) (Dietrich 2013: 7).” Inspiration can in this manner be seen as a possibility to help individuals and collectives access this ever-unfolding pull towards new and different dynamic equilibriums. This is because inspiration, rather than taking us away from embodied life, “brings us most fully into the heart of it, begs for our full presence, and transforms it before our eyes (Hart in Hart et al. 2000: 50).” The importance of this becomes even more visible

when one looks at what Hart calls the opposite end of the continuum from where inspiration dances. This is the movement of depression, which is “constantly described as: flat, boring, lifeless, ordinary, plodding, stagnant, stuck, and empty (Hart in Hart et al. 2000: 41).” For anyone - such as myself - who has lived the apparently bottomless, dense, and weighty experience of depression for shorter or longer times, it is clear how essential the other side is. Finding moments that provide some sense of sustenance and energy is literally lifesaving when one stands in the middle of the depression swamp. This is true whether these moments manage to dance all the way to where inspiration arises or not. Moreover, through regular encounters with inspiration, the depression swamp might not become deep enough to sink into to begin with. This is because inspiration provides a preventative antidote through realizing contact, presence, and meaning, as well as a sense of support through and as one’s embodied-relational dance. Hart asks: “as inspiration emerges as a way of knowing and being, to what extent does our style of knowing effect our psychological well-being? What role does the constricted epistemic style in our contemporary culture have on our mental and spiritual health (Hart in Hart et al. 2000: 42)?”

I find in this regard that both the individual - ‘our style of knowing’ - and the collective - ‘the constricted epistemic style in many contemporary cultures’ - are crucial. There are undeniably aspects both ‘within’ and ‘around’ that can make it difficult to unfold inspiration this way. In this context, Hart contends how the process of inspiration, similarly to soul, can ultimately not be willed or forced but needs to be “wooed or welcomed (Hart in Hart et al. 2000: 44).” He furthermore underlines different dynamics that can help this ‘welcoming and wooing’ evolve, emphasizing aspects related to *setting* - how inspiration can be evoked/facilitated by other persons, art, meditation, nature, acts of love, and more (Hart in Hart et al. 2000: 44-45) - as well as (*mind*)*set*, which including capacities for focus, trust, letting go, listening (receiving inspiration when it arises), as well as embodying (related to



the before-discussed form and/or being) (Hart in Hart et al. 2000: 46-50). Inspiration thus seems to emerge through a similar paradoxical process of practice as previously highlighted related to, amongst others, Imraan and Marisu. It requires an active engagement of further possibilities *and* an unconditional surrender - a 'letting go' - into what *is*. I become with this curious to understand how Open Floor can potentially help 'welcome and woo' inspiration this way. To deeper explore it, I take a closer look at what Rivi articulates related to Open Floor specifically (rather than also the 5Rhythms practice) in the following.

#### **4.5.6 A Huge Opening into Interconnected and Playful**

Connected to her experiences of transitioning into not only teaching and practicing the 5Rhythms but also helping to co-create Open Floor - which Rivi, as mentioned, experienced through being a founding member of Open Floor International - Rivi emphasizes how she was, to begin with, worried that the "component of magic" "that was soo... significant in 5Rhythms" would disappear in Open Floor. Nevertheless, she soon realized how this "magical ingredient" was still present, yet how it now came with an added dimension of "playfulness" and being "interconnected" that was different from the 5Rhythms practice. These added dynamics emerged in turn a "huge opening" where "so many more things were possible," which, according to Rivi, allowed for "an even... deeper... expression of self."

*Rivi: and my big worry about... the... component of magic (...) that was soo... significant in 5Rhythms (...) I was... really worried about losing that [in Open Floor] (...) Would I connect in the same kind of high spiritual way? Would it work on my... soul in the same way 5Rhythms did? And (...) then it was*

Rivi changes her voice into a pleased and almost relived whisper at this point.

*Oh, my God, yes!*

She laughs.

*Rivi: Yes. With some added playfulness. So that was another thing that... Open Floor... actually added to 5Rhythms. (...) It totally opened up the whole realm of playfulness and inter, interconnected and playful. So to connect... through play and creativity. Which... (Rivi looks up, seemingly 'looking for' the next words to speak) (...) like it made it clear to me... (she moves her right hand in front of her, down through her center line, starting at the height of her forehead and then moving it down to the area of her lower throat/upper chest) how*

*that's a very spiritual component. Playfulness (she nods her head). (...) I remember (...) I said, and a few of the founding members and founders [of Open Floor], we said (...) 'oh my God, we never had such... such dances! Like we've been dancing for years, and it's been always significant, but we've never had... such dances'.*

Rivi inhales and begins to lean her upper body slightly towards the right side of the screen.

*And when I think now it was about the connections (she moves her upper body to the center of the screen again) the connections on the dance floor... were of a new flavor (...) it was out of the mold.*

A bit later, Rivi continues.

**Rivi:** *so there was an opening, huge opening with Open Floor that... so many more things were possible (Rivi looks up and to the side while squinting her eyes and resting her words on an 'eh' sound. Her face muscles are working. It appears to me that she is deeply engaged in intuiting her way towards what to express next). It allowed an even deeper expression... of self. So while emotional expression was (...) I fully experienced in 5Rhythms... total emotional expression... and spiritual expression... and physical expression, Open Floor added to that... kind of... (she moves her hands on both sides of her body from up to down, creating what almost appears as two half circles in the air around herself. Only when she reaches the 'bottom' of this half circle does she speak the next word) self. Like... all the layers at the same time. And that was also a gateway to transcending, but in a more... in a way like, I remember in stillness<sup>103</sup> in my years of [5Rhythms] practice... it was like a (she moves her hands in front of her from up to down as well as inwards towards her chest) solitude experience. (...) But, with (she opens her hands wide to both sides while looking outwards) Open Floor it kind of... opened the interrelational field (she nods her head). Which allowed for really deep... deep dances... within the belonging. Like I didn't have to shut down and just be in spirit (...) to really connect.*

Straight after this, I ask Rivi about how she, in embodied manners, senses and experiences “this kind of... spiritual... component... through interconnection, and through this play, and through this creativity.” Her answer speaks about presence, connection, and awareness that run both ‘inwards’ and ‘outwards’, as well as about a wider capacity to be present with multiple and even contradictory emotions at the same time.

**Hanne:** *eh... can you... if you really try to remember one... experience where you felt this kind of... spiritual... component... through interconnection, and through this play, and through this creativity? Can you try to describe how... how do you notice it? How does it feel in your body? How do you... feel that... there is an openness, there is a connection, there is a... spiritual part... in, all together in this moment?*

I laugh empathically with myself. Throughout my question, I have been moving my hands in diverse manners to try to aid my words in describing and asking Rivi about this wider experience of connection, playfulness, spirit, and “magic” that she is speaking. I notice how I find it difficult to encounter the words that can adequately describe this ineffable field that we

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<sup>103</sup> Stillness is the fifth rhythm of the 5Rhythms practice. It is the rhythm that most closely associates with spirit as well as the rhythm that is the most explicitly anchored in a process of breathing. See Roth 1998a.

are co-engaging. Nevertheless, I hope that my question has unfolded enough ground for Rivi to emerge her answer out of.

*Rivi: well, there's a very, very strong... presence, awareness. (...) So I'm really... aware of my body... I'm totally aware of what my body is doing and dancing. I'm fully aware of who I am with.*

She settles her words while waiting for the next sentence to emerge.

*Rivi: the surrounding doesn't disappear. But it's kind of a part of it. So, it's in sync. So nothing is bothering it. Like if somebody would... in the past when I would practice... the [5]Rhythms... if somebody was to approach me during stillness (...) it would totally like throw me off (...). And here [in Open Floor] everything is part of the journey. So nothing can... disrupt the moment. Because the awareness is wider. It's not like*

Rivi puts both of her hands in front of her chest with the palms facing and almost touching each other. Right before her palms touch, however, she begins to move her right hand up, down, and then up again in a straight line with the movement seemingly unfolding from in front of her chest where her other hand still lingers.

“Up (...) me and up (...),” she confirms. “But it's like...,” she puts both her hands on her chest before she moves them outwards and to her sides in a wide, circling, and opening movement “wider on the horizontal plane.”

*Eh...*

She continues.

*Rivi: and also... what comes is like there could be a multitude of emotions present that I could be aware of at the same time. Like a deep joy... and also maybe a layer of sadness. Eh... intimacy... and also a layer of aloneness. Like a lot of layers can be present at the same time<sup>104</sup>.*

I bring in this respect special attention to the “interconnected and playful” that Rivi expresses. She explains, as engaged, how Open Floor has helped her unfold a “huge opening” where “so many more things were possible” because, as I phrase it in my question above, this “spiritual... component... through interconnection, and through this play, and through this creativity” has helped her emerge dynamics of presence and awareness in ways that *include*

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<sup>104</sup> It can furthermore be interesting to notice how Rivi, at a later point during the interview, expresses that by now, after years of practicing as a dancer and mover, it is in fact teaching itself that has become such a main “spiritual practice” of interconnectedness, presence, and awareness for her. She explains how teaching emerges many of the same processes and capacities that she earlier cultivated as a dancer and mover, emphasizing how when she teaches, she feels like her “vessels open (...) [her] vertical channels (...) [her] horizontal channels. Like... all the things [she] talked about, the presence, the awareness of many layered things in many domains in one moment. They all... happen when [she is] teaching.” She thus points towards a similar process as previously highlighted related to Tamara, which concern how the relational endeavor of teaching also involves a dynamic that continuously empowers and nourishes the teacher anew.

rather than *exclude* her relational surroundings. She hence emphasizes how her “surrounding doesn't disappear” but is “kind of a part of it. So, it's in sync” and “nothing can... disrupt the moment.” This is notably different from what she expresses related to the 5Rhythms practice, where she could earlier experience that “if somebody was to approach [her] during stillness (...) it would totally like throw [her] off.” It seems to have happened because spiritual realms were in the 5Rhythms practice often emerged through a “solitude experience” alone.

Rivi brings with this vital attention back to a dynamic previously engaged related to Tamara. It concerns how one does not need to “choose between (...) being... authentic and being with people” but how one can co-engage the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ within an intertwined dance. Rivi furthermore expands this ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ to include the transpersonal moment of connecting not only vertically - “me and up” - but also horizontally, emphasizing another key element involved in the before-discussed process of breathing. In addition to emerging embodied self-connections and connections to a wider, spiritual field, breath also connects to horizontal embeddedness. One can therefore, through breathing, realize how one is a dynamically attuned ‘resonator’ (Shepherd 2017: 56) - a contact boundary at work - who inhales and exhales through and as an intertwined, relational dance. Koppensteiner asks: “when does the breath I inhale cease to be environment and become a part of me? At which point exactly is the breath I exhale no longer mine (Koppensteiner 2020: 3)?” This fluid transition between ‘me’ and ‘more-than-me’, moreover, carry a profound potential for transpersonal connection, helping to elicit the before mentioned “peace that comes from the awareness and connection with something larger than our skin-encapsulated self (Open Floor International 2017: 22).”

I argue with this how Rivi helps underline a similar participatory approach to transpersonal phenomena as earlier discussed related to Ferrer. It underlines, as mentioned, how humans do not access spirit as an exclusively ‘inner’ and individual experience but co-

participate as embodied-relational beings in spaces and contexts - ‘multilocal participatory events’ (Ferrer 2002, Ferrer in Hart et al. 2000) - where processes of spirit unfold. What Rivi expresses related to “playful and interconnected” can in this sense be seen as such a multilocal, participatory realm. It is, as Rivi at one point expresses, a “gateway to transcending” that emerges through affirmatively participating in rather than disconnecting from embodied-relational life. In Rivi’s case, this affirmative participation seems to, amongst others, have been facilitated through an animating process of *play(fulness)*.

Gammage argues how play and playfulness is fundamental. This is because it is fun, inspiring, energizing, pleasurable, and enjoyable, yet also because it is key for how embodied wholes co-create and co-maintain healthy relationships (Gammage 2017: 32). Play carries in this sense a crucial capacity to help emerge authentic possibilities for presence and contact because it allows embodied wholes to be spontaneous about - ‘play with’ - and let go of fixed identities and ‘solid’ boundaries created between diverse ‘inner parts’ - such as ‘mind’ and ‘body’ - as well as between the surroundings and oneself. According to Gammage: “playful exploration gives us the freedom to experiment - physically, emotionally, cognitively, socially, and spiritually. (...) It gives us the possibility to form and re-form ourselves (...) (Gammage 2017: 42).” Play represents in this manner an active and affirmative engagement that exposes and participates in one of the most basic truths about embodied existence. It

challenges us to reify anything that we might create as we experience first the empty yet potential space, the making of a creation and the deconstruction/ deroling/ destruction of that creation. It doesn’t exist, it exists, now it doesn’t exist, and yet we are changed by it having existed. It takes only the smallest amount of imagination to apply these principles to our own emotional states, our thoughts, our own lives, the life of this planet and so on. The realm of play brings us into direct and unequivocal relationship with impermanence. Everything changes. *Everything* (Gammage 2017: 173. Emphasis in original).

Play unfolds with this as a facilitated entryway into one of the potentially most ‘scary’ realities of being alive. It concerns how humans, as embodied wholes, are from the moment that they manifest life not only engaged in a process of living but always also in a process of

dying (see Chödrön 2022). Play can in this respect - through its lighthearted, enjoyable, and energizing dynamics - help us dare the vulnerability of this truth, supporting us to let go of control, open, surrender, be exposed, make contact, actively participate in the dance even though we cannot decide all the dance steps. Gammage affirms how play can indeed help us “stay open and present to possibly overwhelming situations and circumstances, giving us the opportunity to find meaning in the darkest times (Gammage 2017: 46).” Yet, because “the reason we play is simply because it is fun and pleasurable. It makes us feel more connected to life (Gammage 2017: 49),” play “is not only a defense against a frightening or dangerous world. It is fundamentally a way of creatively engaging with the world (Gammage 2017: 54).” Vitality however, for play to carry such life-affirming potentials, it needs to be and remain voluntary. If not, it easily enters the shadow side of play whereby the vulnerability involved can be manipulated and misused. Gammage contends: “if someone is forced to play or continue playing against their wishes, the activity ceases to be play (Gammage 2017: 39).”

Looking in this respect back at the process of inspiration previously discussed - which, as engaged, unfolds through a paradoxical endeavor that involves active engagement *and* unconditional surrender - I underline how this dynamic of play(fulness) can be key. The “interconnected and playful” that Rivi expresses has for example helped her emerge an expanded fabric of possibilities - a “huge opening” where “so many more things were possible” - through which she can affirmatively engage herself, her surroundings, and the “magical ingredient” of life without, importantly, needing to exclude, ‘control’, and/or ‘streamline’ any of these interconnected realms that she is living. One of the ways that she describes her experience of “interconnected and playful” is in this sense precisely through how “there could be a multitude of emotions present that [she] could be aware of at the same time. Like a deep joy... and also maybe a layer of sadness. Eh... intimacy... and also a layer of aloneness.” She hence appears to underline a paradoxical ability to be simultaneously

present with multiple and even contradictory dynamics, mirroring the previously discussed capacity for paradoxical curiosity engaged related to Lederach (2005). In a similar vein, the endeavor of play(fulness) can help individuals and collectives manifest such an inspired and wholeness-embracing process, helping them to *both* (playfully) let go of and surrender fixed ideas and rigid needs for ‘control’ *and* to evolve a joyful, fun, and even pleasurable experience of, as Rivi phrases it, being “interconnected and playful.”

#### **4.5.7 Adding Mindful Integration, and the Puzzle is Whole**

To with this end my engagement with the interview encounter with Rivi, I underline a final aspect that emerges. It concerns how Rivi, in relation to Open Floor specifically, does not only talk about “interconnected and playful” but also about “another missing piece” that was not present in the 5Rhythms practice, yet which she recognized from her earlier work as a dance/movement therapist. This was the piece about “mindfulness and cognitive integration,” which, according to Rivi, made her dance and movement “puzzle... [become] whole.”

Rivi brings in this sense attention to a central aspect that I have argued throughout the research. It relates how Open Floor can be an embodied resource for peaces not through denying ‘mind’ but through integrating and co-engaging the manifold processes of embodied wholeness. Gammage similarly affirms how the seemingly ‘opposite’ endeavors of mindful meditation and spontaneous play are in the end not so different. They rather both emerge “a lightness of touch, a spontaneity, an endeavoring not to grasp hold, allowing an unfolding, witnessing, and, ultimately, the sense of knowing oneself better through the experience (Gammage 2017: 206).” In this respect, Rivi emphasizes how Open Floor has helped her unfold “widening options,” “fluidity,” and “choice” through co-engaging rather than choosing between her sensate, spontaneous, and playful “child self” and her aware, reflected, and mindful “adult self.” The ability “to flow between” these equally important yet different facets of herself, moreover, is, according to Rivi, what constitutes “a process of maturity”

that she has unfolded “parallel (...) with [her] dance [and movement] practice” - including as a dance/movement therapist and as a student and teacher of the 5Rhythms and Open Floor.

Rivi underlines with this how Open Floor has, in addition to (re)connecting her to a “playful and interconnected” field, supported her to emerge a mindful capacity to “pause”, “suspending reactivity,” “coming more from responsivity”, and “cultivate that space between stimulus and response.” The combination of these movements - playfulness and mindfulness - has in turn helped deepen her capacities for ‘inner-outer’ presence by nourishing her abilities to “be aware... to [her]self and [her] emotions and [her] impulses and [her] thoughts and [her] feelings and [her] sensations. And at the same time being a witness to what's going on outside<sup>105</sup>.” This increased ability for awareness has furthermore unfolded widened possibilities for “choice”, which Rivi highlights related to several different dynamics in her life. She mentions, for example, how she can now easier take a “pause” and “check-in” if she notices that she is about to “shoot up” in her relationship with her husband, and with this be able to *respond* rather than *react* to what is happening. Furthermore, she talks about her “peace activism” in relation to how “there are different positions [in Women Wage Peace, the peace initiative that Rivi is active in] and [she has] the choice. And what informs the choice is... [her] inner state, (...) [her] resources, [her]... situation. But [she has] a choice.”

The one example that I want to bring added attention to, however, concerns how Rivi is an Open Floor teacher (and peace activist) who lives and works in a lived context of peaces and conflicts related to the Israel-Palestine conflict. I ask in this respect Rivi at one point about what her intention as an Open Floor teacher is: “what (...) [she] want[s] (...) [her] students to... get out of... practicing with [her]? What [she] want[s] to (...) give through [her] teaching?” As one answer to this question, Rivi explains how she wants to help her

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<sup>105</sup> In relation to this quote, Rivi largely attributes her learning to the work of Andrea Juhan who, as mentioned, often combines Open Floor with perspectives from therapy. See for example Juhan 2003.



students emerge widened capacities for “spontaneity and fluidity” because, as Rivi phrases it, spontaneity is “a big thing (...), especially in Israel, it’s... so important.”

In the following, I highlight selected parts of what Rivi articulates when I after this ask her about “and why do you say (...) that it’s [spontaneity] especially important in Israel. Can you say a bit more about that?” The stories that Rivi shares - which concern embodied processes of mindfulness, choice, resilience, spontaneity, and fluidity in what can at times be, as Rivi phrases it, a “very chaotic” context - are highly interesting to reflect upon as regards the embodied peace focus of this research. I emphasize however how I am only covering one unique and, importantly, *Israeli* perspective with these stories from Rivi. Since there are no Open Floor teachers currently living and teaching in Palestine, moreover, I cannot bring a perspective from this context into my discussion. The point is also not to cover the complexities of the Israel-Palestine conflict but to bring attention to what Rivi expresses regarding a lived endeavor of, as engaged, embodied resilience, spontaneity, and choice in a societal and political situation that can at times, as mentioned, be “very chaotic<sup>106</sup>.”

*Hanne: Eh, and why do you say, eh... (...) that it's [spontaneity] especially important in Israel. Can you say a bit more about that?*

“Eh” Rivi makes a long pause before she answers, looking up and to the side while thinking. “Because this is a very chaotic country,” she begins, “both external events, but also the way... the government is run, and the way things run (...) It's a very chaotic country (...) you can't predict anything. Really, shit happens like in the drop of a hat.”<sup>107</sup>

A bit later, furthermore, Rivi continues:

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<sup>106</sup> Rivi seems in this regard to, on a personal level, be in deep disagreement with several aspects related to the current (as of 2021) political situation of Israel, which she brings attention to at several points during our interview encounter. Furthermore, this interview was conducted as well as the discussion of it unfolded before the events of October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, where the Gaza-based Hamas violently attacked Israel - including through, in the words of UN Secretary-General António Guterres, “the deliberate killing, injuring and kidnapping of civilians” as well as “the launching of rockets against civilian targets (Guterres 2023: para 8)”- which in turn unleashed a horrifying war on Gaza where the suffering involved has, at the time when I am adding this part of the footnote (January 2024), reached excruciating depths that I cannot even begin to fathom. Personally, I am deeply distraught by these current events that are taking place.

<sup>107</sup> Rivi connects this ‘chaos’ that she mentions both to the Israel-Palestine conflict and to the Covid-19 pandemic and the following regulations implemented by the Israeli government concerning how one could, as Rivi phrases it, risk getting “an announcement of a lockdown... from today to tomorrow, or today to this evening.” In the following, I focus on what Rivi expresses related to the Israel-Palestine conflict in this respect.

**Rivi:** *so we could be, we were dancing and a war breaks out. Like, as we're dancing. (...) I see a couple students going to their phone and (...) I'm like, because they don't check their phone during [class], and I'm like 'what's going on?'. And they're like 'our kid is in summer camp and missiles started falling not far and... they're bringing them home'. (Rivi pauses her words while she looks straight into the camera before she proceeds). And we end class and we're like 'oh... it seems like a war has broke out'.*

She immediately continues.

**Rivi:** *or... we're dancing and there's ambulance sirens outside because it was... during the time of a lot of terror attacks in Jerusalem. So we're dancing and there's sirens of ambulances, and we're thinking 'okay, why do we... what are (...) what's going to be on the news when we come out?'* (Rivi instantly proceeds to her next example). *Or... um... we're dancing during the war, and I give the drill of 'if there's a siren while we're dancing (...) this assistant will lead everybody to the shelter. Everybody follow, I will be in the back. (She pauses her words for a brief moment). And to even come and dance and then there's 'boom, boom, boom' from rockets falling in the distance. And to keep going... or to even come, choose to come dance during wartime. (...) I think it has to do with spontaneity (...) [and] resilience. I find that spontaneity is... a direct factor for resilience.*

At this point, Rivi pauses and keeps her words silent for quite some time before she adds:

*Cause when you're spontaneous (...) it means you're letting go of expectations, of... agenda, of attachment to how things need to be, should be... and you're willing to dance with what... is.*

What Rivi brings attention to concerns in this respect, amongst others, how embodied capacities for spontaneity, mindfulness, fluidity, and choice - which she explains has for her been cultivated amongst others through Open Floor - can notably help emerge a lived endeavor of resilience within, as Rivi phrases it, a “very chaotic” context. Without, as engaged, claiming that I am entering the depth of the Israel-Palestine conflict (or without trying to compare anything with anything), I can in this sense imagine how the different situations that Rivi expresses might involve a high potential for insecurity and destabilization, as her students and herself are worried about themselves, their children, as well as about other family members or friends - or even about the whole deeply entrenched and painful political situation that their region of living is embedded within. In this context, Rivi articulates how “when you're spontaneous” you can “let(...) go of expectations, of... agenda, of attachment to how things need to be, should be...” and instead “dance with what... is.” She thus points towards a core meaning of the word ‘resilience’. Etymologically speaking, ‘resilience’

connects to a movement of ‘recoiling’ and ‘rebounding’ (Online Etymology Dictionary 2022). Yet, this ‘recoiling and rebounding’ cannot be about returning to exactly what has been but about continuously finding new and life-affirming ways to integrate, relate with, and ultimately transform this ‘been’ into a new and homeostatic manifestation of life (see also Siegel 2011). In this process, the embodied capacities for choice, spontaneity, mindfulness, and fluidity that Rivi articulates can help manifest an ongoing dance that emerges in line with the paradoxical practice previously highlighted related to, amongst others, Marisu - the need to radically accept what *is* (Brach 2003) and to transform - as well as with the ‘artistic-like expressions of resiliency’ (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 227) engaged related to Imraan. Vitally however, this practice and expression of resilience is, I affirm, not only relevant as regards the ‘larger’ dynamics of peaces, violences, and conflicts that Rivi emphasizes, but also as regards the many ‘smaller’ and everyday processes of balances and imbalances that, as an example, can connect to a process of “soul” that “was suffocating.”

Rivi and I have in this sense, through our relational discussion in this subchapter, returned to a vital argument that I have emphasized throughout the research at large. It concerns how embodied processes of peaces cannot be about finding the ‘perfect’ and all-encompassing ‘solution’ but requires an ongoing engagement of ever new homeostatic (dis)equilibriums. This is because embodied peaces *are* about constantly emerging new life-affirming potentials for co-being, co-becoming, co-knowing, and co-relating in this way. The lived capacities for choice, fluidity, spontaneity, and resilience that Rivi highlights are in this context crucial. Yet, these capacities do, as Rivi emphasizes, not emerge in a one-dimensional endeavor but through an integrating dance where processes of interconnection, soul, playfulness, “magic”, and “free spirit” can unfold together and along with “mindfulness”, reflection, ‘inner-outer’ awareness, “pause,” and more. In this regard, Rivi’s homeostatic dance of re-nourishing a stressed “soul” that “was suffocating” mirrors one of

my main insights during the inquiry so far. It relates to how embodied peaces can only evolve if embodied multiplicity is affirmed and engaged rather than suppressed, devalued, and/or denied. It can with this perhaps best described as a ‘dance of multiples’. Embodied peaces involve, in a poetic choice of words, multiple balances and multiple imbalances, multiple contradictions and multiple making sense, multiple boths and multiple ands, multiple movements and multiple stillpoints, multiple ‘I am’ and multiple ‘we are becoming’. To meaningfully approach this lived field of multiplicity through words therefore - which is an endeavor that I am incompletely attempting in this research - is challenging. Nevertheless, it is a key process to effort as regards deeper understanding how embodied peaces evolve. As one step closer in that direction, I engage the interview with Stefan in the following.

#### **4.6 Stefan - *Embodying the Dance***

Stefan is a *trevlig* (friendly), centered, calm, *nyfiken* (curious), and well-articulate Swedish Open Floor teacher in the beginning of his 50’s who lives in Stockholm and who teaches the 5Rhythms and Open Floor in Stockholm and in other places. He is, along with Marisu, one of the only two teachers who I have interviewed who I have not met before, as Stefan and I have neither trained as teachers together nor met in a physical class/workshop. Nonetheless, I have heard the name Stefan spoken to me ever since I started my own Open Floor teacher-training, as several people within the training program - before they got to know me yet in the moment that they realized I am Norwegian - eagerly asked me if I know this Swedish Open Floor teacher called Stefan. Every time, I had to disappoint their enthusiastic attempt to encounter a shared reference, as I had been living in Austria for quite some time at that point and had therefore barely danced in a Scandinavian setting at all (except for a few 5Rhythms classes in Oslo held by a Norwegian teacher). As such, I spent much of my initial days as a new Open Floor teacher-in-training explaining to people how I did *not* know Stefan. The result,

however, is that when I later reached out to him to ask if I could interview him for this research, I already felt that I knew him a bit due to my previous familiarity with his name.

During our interview meeting, Stefan explains to me how he has always been a very “*nyfiken*” (curious) person who will “never be done learning” because he has, throughout his life, constantly been “hungry to learn more.”<sup>108</sup> This hunger for learning seems to be particularly relevant related to diverse practices that center around cultivating an embodied connection to self, others, and life, considering how Stefan carries a varied and extensive background within the broader embodiment field. As he himself phrases it during the self-written presentation on the Open Floor International webpage: his “passion and path during 25 years has been in the field of body, mind and heart awareness through massage, dance and movement, yoga, breath work, shamanism and vipassana meditation (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Find a Teacher: Stefan’).” Stefan has therefore explored conscious dance and movement and other embodiment practices for more than two decades, having, amongst others, been a 5Rhythms teacher since 2004, an Open Floor teacher since 2015, and has been trained to facilitate the Libido focus in Open Floor since 2018<sup>109</sup>.

This open curiosity and hunger towards new learning is in this sense also what brought Stefan towards Open Floor. He expresses how he, when he first heard about this new practice that some of his former 5Rhythms teachers (the founders and founding members of Open Floor) were creating, experienced a “huge yes” within him that was “both... privately and professionally;” “a fully natural ‘yes’ signal” that was both him “as... a dancer and as a human (...) and also [him] as a... facilitator<sup>110</sup>.” With this intuitive ‘yes’, Stefan became part of the first cohort of Open Floor teachers-in-training. I realize with this how Stefan and I share some important similarities. We both make at least some of our vital life decisions

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<sup>108</sup> *aldrig färdig lärd / hungrig på att lära [s]ig mer.*

<sup>109</sup> See the introduction to the interview with Imraan (chapter 4.4) for my previous explanation of Libido.

<sup>110</sup> *ett stort ‘ja’ / både... privat och professionellt / en helt naturlig ‘ja’ signal / som... dansare och som människa (...) och också [han] som en... facilitator*

based on an intuitive sense of ‘yes’ rather than (only) upon a rational understanding of what is ‘useful’, we are both driven by a deep inclination towards wanting to learn more, and we both seem to have found embodiment practices an especially interesting field to explore.

When Stefan and I meet via Zoom, which happens right after midday on an early February Wednesday in 2021, one of the first things that I ask him before we begin the more official interview part is whether he wants us to speak together in Swedish/Norwegian or in English. I ask this because Norwegian and Swedish are, at the one hand, languages that are similar enough for it to often be easily understood between each other, and, at the other hand, can also be different enough for some people to find it challenging<sup>111</sup>. Stefan’s response is in this context that it is no problem for him to speak Swedish/Norwegian as long as I can also understand him, thus gratefully allowing us to speak together in our Scandinavian mother tongues. I find it in this regard highly enriching to be able to tap into our mother tongues in this manner, bringing out different flavors and textures as compared to when I otherwise - with the exception of Gunvor - have to interview the Open Floor teachers in English.

During the interview, Stefan is wearing a light blue/turquoise t-shirt while he is standing rather than sitting in what I believe is his living room. It is a white-painted, light room with the only non-white elements that I can see being a wooden shelf with some plants, a blue picture on one of the walls, and the corner of another picture on another wall. His room thus appears in visible contrast to the dark living room that I am sitting in, which, although also white, receives noticeably less daylight than what Stefan’s room does. I am in this sense also wearing a light-blue clothing, yet in difference from Stefan I have gone for a warm version of fleece. Looking at the two of us, therefore, one might get the impression that we are living in different seasons. I am in the middle of the cold, dark Scandinavian winter; Stefan has moved towards the light and hopeful arrival of the bright Scandinavian Spring.

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<sup>111</sup> I also asked the same question to Gunvor at the beginning of our talk, although I have not described it in much detail in the introduction to the interview. Norwegian and Danish are in, in a comparable vein, both similar and different enough for some people to understand it easily and for others to find it more challenging.

This lightness and the felt sense of ease as one (metaphorically) moves towards a brighter season is in this respect also present in how Stefan expresses himself both verbally and more-than-verbally during our interview encounter. He is, for example, standing rather than sitting throughout our talk, which gives him a flavor of being light-footed, fluid, agile, and whole-bodily ready to dance (with) whatever life might unfold for him next. For a moment, I do with this also consider if I should perhaps stand rather than sit during our meeting, yet I quickly realize how a sitting position is better for me in that context due to my researching needs to keep taking notes. I thus let it be with the consideration alone, settling into my sitting position as the best alternative for me. Furthermore, whenever I ask Stefan a question, I notice how he manages to convey a straightforward and simple clarity to his answers that allows him to express deep reflections and insightful experiences without too many words involved. It therefore manifests our interview encounter as the shortest interview that I did, with the officially recorded part only lasting 36 minutes. Interestingly, my initial tendency is in this respect to (overly) judge myself and (self)critically wonder if I did a good enough job as a researcher - did I perhaps not ask deep enough questions since our meeting was so short? - yet, after being able to compassionately recognize this self-judgmental tendency, I realize how it might in fact be this simple clarity, ease of words, and dynamically evolving presence of Stefan that *is* the key wisdom that this interview is emerging.

#### **4.6.1 My Relational Encounters with Ease**

Building upon my final sentence above, I emphasize how I engage this interview encounter in a slightly different manner as compared to the other interviews that I have engaged. The reason for this is that Stefan carries a tendency to speak to me in ways that are not primarily tied to his words (alone) but to his more-than-verbal ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating. This embodied more-than-verbal sharing, moreover, moves to touch a resonating web of being, becoming, knowing, and relating in me, calling me to, through my encounter

with Stefan, honestly reflect upon and engage how I myself embody and live the many insights, sharings, wisdoms, and discussions that have emerged during this research so far. Stefan hence helps me manifest a relational space of insights, lightheartedly embracing an embodied peace dance that honors and lives the imperfect, paradoxical, multifaceted, relational, and ever-transforming web that embodied peaces are.

What Stefan helps me co-evolve concerns in this respect a curious encounter and lived engagement with a *felt sense of ease* as a vital practice and process of peaces. I have in this sense chosen the word ‘ease’ to describe what I am experiencing because it associates for me with aspects such as dynamism, flow, movement, space, simplicity, centeredness, joy, calmness, lightness, and even with peace itself. These are importantly all dynamics that I tap into and encounter in relation to the interview between Stefan and I. I do in this regard, in difference from many dictionary definitions that I find (see Cambridge Dictionary 2023, Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2023, Collins English Dictionary 2023), not primarily engage ease through its so-called negative definition of what it is *not* - for example: the absence of pain, worry, difficulties, restrictions, and/or other - but through its so-called positive definition of what it *is*. This is in my understanding a key epistemological shift that can help engage a deeper and more transformative understanding of ease.

This sensation of ease that I am exploring arises in this regard, as touched upon, *both* through what Stefan more-than-verbally (and verbally) expresses *and* out of how his expressions often move to touch something deeply meaningful in me. For example, Stefan is, as mentioned, standing rather than sitting throughout our talk. This gives him, as stated, a flavor of being light-footed, light-bodied, fluid, agile, and whole-bodily present to dance (with) whatever life might unfold for him next. It thus manifests as a way of being, becoming, knowing, and relating that *both* roots him into the very moment *and* that allows him to keep dancing life’s ever-unfolding dance of perpetual becoming. Furthermore, this



presence of fluidity and lightness does, as stated, move to touch something meaningful in me, starting to affect me already at the beginning of our talk (before we commence the officially recorded interview part) when Stefan asks me if it is okay that he stands rather than sits during our meeting. As I answer him that ‘of course, yes, that’s perfect’, I realize how this question of his has already unfolded a lighthearted sense of curiosity within me, making me, as engaged, non-judgmentally wonder if also I should perhaps stand rather than sit during our talk. As stated, however, I quickly settle for a seated position being a better option for me in that context, yet this ‘simple’ act of wondering has already changed my ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating. It has emerged a flavor of being open, curious, and even playful, as I have encountered an option of positioning myself differently even if I have not chosen to follow this option into a physical form. With it, I enter our more official interview part with a felt sensation of playful wonder and open curiosity involved, ready to listen to whatever Stefan might share with whole-bodied interest, presence, and attention.

This lighthearted openness, ease, and playful curiosity continue to color our interview dance as I begin asking my researching questions and Stefan, as he phrases it at the end of our talk, “*tömmer ur [s]ig på [m]ina frågor*” (literally translated: empty [him]self out on [my] questions - to answer with depth and extensivity). It becomes especially visible related to the already mentioned ‘simple and straightforward clarity’ that Stefan manages to convey in his answers, using, as mentioned, often less words in his responses than many of the other Open Floor teachers who I have interviewed. The ‘emptying out’ that Stefan is doing therefore makes me think of the haiku-like<sup>112</sup> quality that Lederach describes related to peacebuilding and conflict transformation, accentuating an art of embracing “complexity through simplicity (Lederach 2005: 67)” because “the key to complexity is finding the elegant beauty of

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<sup>112</sup> Haiku is a traditional form of Japanese poetry. Haiku poems are short - “one breath-length (Yasuda 2001: 40)” - expressing a simple, direct, yet fully involved aesthetic experience of a phenomenon/object (often from the natural world) rather than trying to describe, explain, or add further meaning to this object/phenomenon. See Yasuda 2001 for more information.

simplicity (Lederach 2005: 66).” Although Stefan does not literally speak in poems, there is in my experience of it a felt quality to his expressions that often makes me feel into this elegant haiku-like simplicity through, in, and between his words.

Interestingly however, I do not fully manage to recognize the importance of this haiku-like simplicity that I am experiencing before after Stefan and I are done and our online interview has been closed. As I am leaving my living room where I have conducted the interview and enter the kitchen instead, I am met by my husband who asks me how the interview went. It is in this moment that I begin to experience a huge wave of insecurity and (self)doubt. I begin, as mentioned, to (self)critically wonder if I did a good enough job as a researcher, questioning if the interview was perhaps ‘too smooth’, ‘too easy’, and all ‘too short’ as compared to the other two interviews - Gunvor and Rivi - that I had conducted so far at that point. I therefore begin to look through my interview notes, self-judgmentally trying to discover the points where I might have ‘missed my chance’ to go deeper. Crucially however, there is a moment where I experience a felt shift. Instead of (only) engaging the (overly) critical dynamic that keeps looking for ‘errors’ and ‘faults’, I (also) move into that (self)compassionate and (self)empathic capacity for wholeness that realizes how ‘smoothness’ and ‘ease’ are also essential for peaces. With it, I begin to dance into a calm and centered sense of intuitive clarity that makes me acknowledge how, as engaged, it might be precisely this simple clarity, ease of words, and dynamically evolving presence of Stefan that *is* the key wisdom that this interview is emerging. As I now subsequently engage the discussion of this interview, therefore, I *choose* to follow this felt sense of ease that I am experiencing by purposefully exploring this topic rather than (un)consciously avoiding it ‘simply’ because my cultural upbringing - as well as academic culturalization - might tell me that (self)criticism is a ‘more valid’ option to pursue. This capacity for choice - which I have

also engaged related to Rivi - is moreover a key ingredient within the ongoing dance that I, in this inquiry, have chosen to name *embodied peaces*.

#### **4.6.2 The Ease that Is Also the Effort, the Effort that Is Also the Ease**

I underline with this how I explore a multifaceted rather than one-dimensional fabric of ease in this subchapter. It is hence not about ‘avoiding’ or ‘getting rid of’ difficulties, pains, complexities, and struggles but about cultivating a way of relating with these dynamics that unfold as life affirmative. It can with this help me (and others) tap into an embodied reality of imperfection, contradiction, and complexity rather than trying to evolve a ‘perfect’, abstract, and, essentially, *unrealistic* idea about what this ease ‘should’ and ‘should not’ be. It is in other words an embodied endeavor; an art and practice that, in a *yin-yang* manner of paradox, is and becomes both the ease and the effort within a paradoxical endeavor of living.

There are in this context four key elements that I, based amongst others upon my description of the interview with Stefan above, want to highlight as regards this felt sense of ease that I am discussing. It is, first, a felt sense of ease that is not about a static state of perfection but about an ever-transforming process that keeps emerging differently anew along with the ever-changing flow of each present moment. Second, it is, as mentioned, a paradoxical sense of ease that includes rather than excludes the effort, the tensions, the struggles, the conflicts, the pain. Third, it is an ease that does not revolve around creating rigid categories of ‘good’ or ‘bad’, ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, but about an ongoing engagement with multiple ways that individuals and collectives relate to themselves, their surroundings, and to life - about *the quality of relationships*. Fourth, it is an ease that includes a central element of *choice* and thus the possibility to choose these ways that one relates with oneself, the surroundings, and life. In this respect, I explore different perspectives that can help me investigate what this felt sense of ease might include, starting with the Taoist notion of *Te*.

*Te* can, according to Cooper, be translated as ‘virtue’ within the English language. Yet, this ‘virtue’ is not understood in a moral sense but as “the quality of natural goodness which is the result of enlightenment and of the manifestation and function of Tao in [humans] and all that exist in the universe (Cooper 2010: 13).” *Te* can therefore be said to denote “Tao made manifest, the revelation of the true nature of Tao (Cooper 2010: 12)” in the manifest world. Additionally, Cooper uses phrases such as ‘inward quality’ and ‘potentiality’ to describe *Te*, explaining how it is a “latent natural power [in everyone and everything] arising from and dependent on the Tao, from which it is an emanation (Cooper 2010: 12).” In a comparable vein, US American sinologist and professor of Chinese Victor Mair (1990) translates *Te* as ‘integrity’ (remember how I have, in relation to Imraan, previously discussed ‘integrity’ as the quality and process of feeling/being whole), contending how *Te* is the “actualization of the cosmic principle [*Tao*] in the self (...) the embodiment of the [*Tao*] (...) (Mair 1990: 135)” through and within each living existence. Nonetheless, because Taoism is built upon a fundamentally relational ontology (Cooper 2010), this ‘individual’ integrity and wholeness is not understood in the sense of a separate self but as the expression of “self-nature or self-realization, *only in relation to the cosmos* (Mair 1990: 135. Emphasis added).”

Without claiming that I fully understand the depths of these Taoist wisdoms - how could I when I have not myself practiced and lived this profoundly embodied and experiential philosophy, cosmovision, and religion/spirituality? - I humbly tap into an engagement with *Te* to deeper discuss the felt sense of ease that I am exploring together with Stefan in this subchapter. I understand in this respect *Te* to unfold as the dynamically manifesting capacity to embody and live in accordance with *Tao* in this world: the practice and art of embodying *Tao* through and within one’s ongoing manners of being, becoming, knowing, and relating. I have in this sense, in chapter 1, previously discussed *Tao* as the underlying First and undivided principle of Taoism, which is “inexpressible in words, being no-thing-ness, yet the

potential of all things (...) the non-existent containing the potential of existence (Cooper 2010: 8).” *Tao* can therefore never be fully explained or grasped but incompletely approached through an embodied engagement with aspects such as dynamism, limitless potential, that which is always present yet ever transforming, the unfolding of ‘spontaneous creation’ (Cooper 2010: 9) through the play of the opposites (*yin-yang*), as well as that which can only be named negatively - Void, Emptiness, non-appearance, and more - because this negative form “is the only possible means for expressing that which is beyond being (Cooper 2010: 8).” *Te*, hence - the embodied manifestation of this principle - can also only be dynamic; a lived, felt, and ever-changing alignment with the spontaneous dance of life.

As I experienced it during and after the interview encounter with Stefan, the felt sense of ease that I encountered share in this context important similarities with this natural sense of spontaneity and intuitive alignment with life that *Te* embodies. Amongst others, this felt sense of ease helped me emerge a comparable feeling of dynamism and intuitively unfolding presence, which is perhaps the most visibly expressed connected to how I *chose* to relate to the before-described possibility for standing rather than sitting during our talk, as well as with the before-described possibility to follow a felt sense of ease rather than (self)criticism in relation to what we had spoken. In both these instances, I opened myself up through curiosity, wonder, (self)empathy, and (self)compassion, embracing the different possibilities that the moment emerged while *also* following an intuitive direction as regards which possibility I needed to dance. I thus, for example, (self)compassionately noticed my tendency for post-interview (self)criticism, embraced it as a possible option to follow, and, subsequently, decided to endeavor a different direction of ease. In my understanding, this ability to take in all what *is* while also choosing to be guided by a holistic sense of knowing as regards what is a life-affirming direction is, I contend, a core and essence of *Te* - as well as of the art and practice of embodying peaces.

Koppensteiner (2020) argues in this respect how the Taoist focus on dynamism, movement, and ongoing flow as the central principle of life entails a radically different approach to being, becoming, knowing, and relating than, for example, the (un)conscious Cartesian-inspired manner of thinking that I have discussed evolves. Instead of trying to (overly) ‘do’, ‘control’, and/or ‘interfere’ with life, a Taoist approach asks one to tune into the ongoing flow of experience and ‘simply’ listen to the wholeness of what *is* as well as of what is continuously becoming. Out of this immediate presence, one can, according to Taoism, tap into an intuitive process of knowing that, as engaged, spontaneously *knows* - in the holistic sense of the word - what is affirmative and needed within each new here and now (see also Cooper 2010, Culham 2013). As Koppensteiner, building amongst others on Simpkins and Simpkins (1999), expresses: a Taoist approach asks one to

become aware of what really is and then align oneself ‘with the tendencies already built into the situation (Simpkins and Simpkins 1999: 70),’ and the latent potential waiting to manifest (...) [because only] by understanding where one is, what the situation is, and what potential is waiting to unfold, an action succeeds [that is] (...) driven by (...) the necessities and requirements of the current moment (Koppensteiner 2020: 176).

Taoism advocates in this sense a deeply relational form of ethics that, rather than asking one to ‘master’, ‘control’, and/or ‘forcefully shape’ life, calls one to become aware of life’s dynamic and interpenetrating connectivity. Cooper therefore calls it a “doctrine of immediacy (Cooper 2010: 51),” referring amongst others to the principle of *wu wei*, which is hard to accurately translate yet that denotes something along the lines of ‘non-interference’, ‘letting-go’, ‘letting-happen’, ‘effortless action’, ‘non-intentional action’ (Cooper 2010: 51, Koppensteiner 2020: 59, Culham 2013: 44). *Wu wei* can hence be said describe the art and practice of doing less to, paradoxically, also do ‘more’ - if ‘more’ is understood in a qualitative rather than quantitative manner. It thus describes the art and practice of dancing *with* rather than *against* the dynamic unfolding of life. Said differently, a Taoist approach understands peace, wellbeing, and life-affirming relationality to arise “when the human

being disturbs the flow of the natural as little as possible (Koppensteiner 2020: 59, see also Dietrich 2012: 49)” because “the only action necessary is to be in accord with the Tao (Cooper 2010: 52).” It is thus a radically different approach to peaces and conflicts as compared to, for example, a modern/liberal peacebuilding paradigm with its focus on action, intervention, initiative, and doing (Richmond 2006, Dietrich 2012: 116-160), seeing as a Taoist approach invites one to pause, not-do, breathe, observe, and then unfold only the action necessary for the homeostatic flow of *Tao* to keep dancing on. Crucially however, this approach does mean to advocate indifference but to manifest the basic insight that life is of such a reality that intuitive relating and immediate presence *is* the way to affirm this life as we are dancing it and as we are being danced by it. Cooper confirms: “the Taoist is not indifferent, but should be totally committed to life (Cooper 2010: 51).”

Bringing with this these Taoist insights and the felt sense of ease that I am discussing into the field of peace research and practice specifically, I emphasize what Lederach calls the three ‘soul disciplines’ involved in an elicitive (rather than liberal/modern) art of building peace. These soul disciplines are 1) *stillness* - the discipline to pause outwardly expressive action/movement to authentically listen to and realize what *is* (both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’) (Lederach 2005: 103-106) - 2) *humility* - the discipline to recognize oneself as an interdependent process in a relational fabric of life who can *both* contribute with unique presence *and* humbly unfold through a dynamic process of learning with and from everyone and everything (Lederach 2005: 106-108) - and 3) *sensuous perception* - the discipline to tap into all one’s senses and faculties as one continuously comes to know, experience, and deeper understand this interpenetrating reality of life (Lederach 2005: 108-110). Furthermore, Lederach (2005) uses - as previously touched upon related to Gunvor - the metaphor of a ‘social web’ to describe this relational peace and conflict landscape. Peaces and conflicts move within an interconnected web of relationships, emerging as relational patterns,

connections, and dynamics that unfold in more or less helpful or harmful ways. Peace and conflict workers therefore need to become both ‘web makers’ and ‘web watchers’ as they help strengthen, weave, and transform this relational fabric of existence.

Crucially, the more ‘outwardly active’ process of web making needs in this sense to rest upon the more ‘quiet’ and ‘still’ process of web watching. This is because this “zen of going nowhere (Lederach 2005: 112),” as Lederach, based on Conniff (2001), expresses it, helps one tune into what are “perhaps two of the most important questions [for peaces and conflicts] (...): What exists? And how are we in relationship to it (Lederach 2005: 111)?” This art and practice of web watching therefore - cultivated, amongst others, through the three soul disciplines described above - can help one realize what *is* because it supports one to become aware of the interpenetrating reality of the present rather than only/primarily one’s personal needs, (pre)conceptions, (mis)understandings, and ideas. As such, this art and practice - which Taoists might refer to as a form of *wu wei* - helps one touch that space that “attends to whole universes with gentle movement (Lederach 2005: 112).”

In a comparable vein, Hanh (2006) contends from a Buddhist perspective how such a mindful practice of deep, authentic listening and presence is, in and by itself, transformative. This is because a true engagement of this practice leads to a genuine form of understanding that empathically and compassionately *sees* - in a much more holistic sense than seeing with one’s physical eyes alone - what is really present and alive as regards the needs, hopes, fears, dreams, and more of (an)other person(s) as well as of oneself. With it, transformation is already emerging because 1) one can more accurately understand how to relate to (an)other(s) and/or oneself in helpful ways, and 2) because understanding is often the very ‘action’ that we, as embodied processes, need to receive from other and ourselves for healing, transformation, thriving, and wellbeing to occur. It thus manifests in line with the before-discussed healing and transformative ‘spacemoments of resonance’ (Lederach and Lederach



2010: 110), emerging as an empathic and compassionate encounter with oneself and each other, which, from an embodied perspective, is vital. As Hanh contends related to suffering:

when we are suffering, we have a strong need for the presence of [another - and, I add, of ourselves] (...). So what we can do - right away - is to manifest our true presence (...) and say the mantra with all our mindfulness: 'Dear one, I know that you are suffering, that is why I am here for you.' Even before you actually do something (...), the [other - and, I add, yourself] is relived. (Hanh 2006: 20).

When it comes to the felt sense of ease that I am exploring with Stefan in this subchapter, I can recognize several different dynamics involved in such a soulful and relational practice of web watching and authentic presence and listening. First, in much of what Stefan is verbally and more-than-verbally sharing - both as regards his personal self-relationship and as regards how he relates to the multiple dynamics that diverse dancers and movers bring into his classes and workshops - I recognize what appears as an authentically grounded and centered capacity to welcome and be present with what *is* without judging, denying, or avoiding. I therefore, as touched upon, get the impression of him as an open, engaged, trustworthy, and warm person who is wholeheartedly able to connect with what *is* both in himself and in his surroundings. Additionally, I can, as mentioned, recognize how Stefan's verbal and more-than-verbal sharings often move to touch something meaningful in me. I thus also encounter the relational practice of web watching and authentic presence and listening in relation to my personal manners of being, becoming, knowing, and relating.

To explain my latter statement, I emphasize some of the personal context that I was living when the interview between Stefan and I took place. As touched upon, I had at that time recently lost my father after a six-year-long, unbearably painful, and utterly exhausting process of dementia that left my father suffering in a way that I never knew was possible and the rest of us - my family and I - to suffer, ache, and agonize with him. Without going into details about how this process unfolded, I can say that, on a personal level, it did nothing more and nothing less than devastate my ground, crush my center, rip my heart into shrivels,

deplete the core of my soul, exhaust the depth of my bones, shatter, for a time, my very passion for life. As I am writing this paragraph two and a half years after my father passed, I can notice how I am still working on recovering from this experience, continuously exploring ways to re-encounter more energy, soothing, calm, and rejuvenation anew.

It was with this utterly clear to me that I when I, during and after the interview with Stefan, kept noticing and meeting a felt sense of ease as the central topic to explore, vitally *needed* to engage this felt sense ease in a way that could honor, respect, and integrate rather than disregard this suffering, chaos, and pain that I had lived. I therefore needed to practice an authentic endeavor of listening, presence, and ‘web watching’ also towards myself, compassionately acknowledging what *was* and what *is* without excluding, evading, or suppressing. This importantly included to empathically acknowledge how the topic of ease was the topic that was coming my way *and*, at the same time, compassionately acknowledge how this topic, due to my current life situation, also felt quite foreign and, at times, rather challenging to engage. Curiously, it was precisely through being open for both these sides that I could tap into the felt sense of ease that I am now discussing, recognizing how this ease can never be about a perfect state of perpetual bliss but about a paradoxically unfolding web that also (rather than only) includes the difficulties, the suffering, the pain. This is because any claim to ‘ease’ that demands perfection and the absence of life’s challenging realities is in the end not felt as ease at all but as a violent attempt to deny the ongoing experiences that we, as vulnerable, contradictory, embodied, and relational contact boundaries at work, live.

Hanh (2006) emphasizes in this respect how a Buddhist notion of non-duality - which cannot be seen apart from the Buddhist notion of ‘interbeing’ (Hanh 2017), which I later engage in relation to Lori - can help one recognize how there is in the final instance no real separation between the so-called ‘different dynamics’ of oneself. Rather, “there is only the care given by the big brother to the little brother (Hanh 2006: 67),” which is a metaphor that

Hanh uses to describe an ongoing capacity for mindful presence and wholeness-oriented awareness - big brother - and our lived, imperfect engagements of embodied life - little brother. Crucially hence, “there should be no conflict, no violence, between one element of our being and another element of our being (Hanh 2006: 72)” because “I know that I am happiness and that I am also suffering, that I am understanding and that I am also ignorance (Hanh 2006: 71).” For Hanh, the key to emerging transformation and relief of suffering is in this sense “to learn the art of transforming compost into flowers (Hanh 2006: 68). It is once again a metaphor that Hanh uses to describe the mindful practice and art of caring for (rather than judging) that which is no longer (visibly) flowering - what is no longer manifesting as life-affirmative - in such a way that it can create new nutrition for different flowers - alternative ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating - to keep unfolding out of and through this old ‘compost’ that *is*. For anyone involved in (organic) gardening, one would in this context know how compost is crucial because this alive material contains the nutrition that is necessary for new life to flourish. Hanh underlines in this regard how when you look deeply at the flower, “you can already see the compost in the flower (Hanh 2006: 68).” Vice versa, “if you look deeply at [the compost] (...) you can see (...) [the] flowers (Hanh 2006: 68).” The flowers and the compost - the new and the old - are therefore not separate but interpenetrating, being, becoming, and unfolding each other within a paradoxical life dance.

Bringing these metaphorical insights into my discussion of ease as a paradoxical web that includes rather than excludes the tensions, the struggles, the pains, I emphasize how this wider ability to dance with seemingly contradictory realities is essential. I bring in this respect attention back to the personal process of chaos and grief that I have underlined related to my father. I would in this context have felt it as disrespectful and even violent towards my experiences if I were to advocate a felt sense of ease that demanded me to disregard or ‘smooth out’ this story that I have lived. This is because I *know* - on a deep, embodied level -

how I will always also continue to be all of that, yet, importantly, how it will never be, or has never been, all of what I am. Both realities are true. Vitaly thus, if I were to advocate a felt sense of ease that demanded me to exclude this embodied reality that I have lived, I would have felt it as irrelevant, abstract, unrealistic, and even violent, as I would have felt it as an ease that cannot be for me but only for those privileged few - if there are any? - who have not (yet) known the depths of pain, fear, grief, and despair. In other words, I would have felt it as an exclusive form of ease. Considering how I have continuously returned to the topic of wider inclusion and diversity in Open Floor (and beyond) in this research, I find it an essential insight to cultivate as a peace researcher, Open Floor teacher, and as a human living.

LaMothe argues in this sense how “we humans are wounded. We can and we do feel pain, every day, along every dimension of our bodily selves, until we die (LaMothe 2015: 138).” It does not mean that pain is all of what we are but that pain is an embodied reality that we, as embodied wholes, need to integrate and engage. In her writings, LaMothe explores in this context a ‘philosophy of bodily becoming’, inviting, as mentioned, an understanding of life as an ongoing process of movement that calls one to continuously be and become an active participant within “the *rhythms of bodily becoming* (LaMothe 2015: 6. Emphasis in original).” It means that humans, as embodied wholes, neither fully control the flow of life nor become helpless dummies in a random flow of movement. Rather, we keep giving our lives ‘a certain shape’ (Koppensteiner 2009) in the ongoing dance that we, along with every other existence, constantly participate in. LaMothe emphasizes in this respect how, when it comes to pain and other ‘difficult’ dynamics, we do not have to ‘stop’ our movement ‘simply’ because we feel pain (which a more mechanistic/’disembodied’ perspective would have us believe). Rather, pain is a signal of physical, emotional, mental and/or spiritual imbalance that ‘simply’ calls us to “*move differently* (LaMothe 2015: 139. Emphasis in

original).” Pain struggle, and suffering, therefore, is not the opposite of ease but already *is*, contains, and becomes this ease through its ongoing pull towards homeostatic transformation.

What I with this want to underline is not to romanticize or ‘prettify’ suffering, pain, and challenges but to recognize how any affirmative discussion of ease cannot unfold through an (un)conscious judgement about what is ‘good enough’ to be included within this ease or not. I therefore (re)emphasize how the felt sense of ease that I am discussing is always available, real, authentic, and possible also when things are wild, chaotic, difficult, and challenging because it is ultimately those who experience/do not experience this ease that can tell us what it is/what it is not. As such, it is a felt sense of ease that is curiously enigmatic, powerfully embodied, and wildly alive, expressing itself in multiple manners through and within our ongoing dances of embodied co-being, co-becoming, co-knowing, and co-relating.

This discussion above is in this sense also a key reason for why I wanted to include LaMothe’s writing - a woman’s perspective - within my engagement of ease. She does, amongst others, write about the vulnerable, strong, intense, painful, and loving experience of giving birth, highlighting an embodied process that is wild, ‘messy’, painful, and chaotic, yet which notably encounters a felt sense of ease through LaMothe’s active participation in, exactly, her ‘rhythms of bodily becoming’. These are her rhythms of breathing, moaning, moving, resting, pushing, screaming, and more (LaMothe 2015). Being myself a woman, although I have never given birth, I *needed* to include this bodily dance of wildness and life-giving pain as also a powerful expression of ease, particularly because the many rhythmic, sensuous, painful, ‘messy’, and ‘uncontrolled’ processes of especially women’s bodies have often been neglected, judged, violated, and suppressed. Furthermore, I consider the painful process of grief that I have emphasized related to my father to manifest as equally ‘messy’ and ‘uncontrollable’ - although seemingly evolving related to the ‘opposite’ side of life - unfolding as a powerful dance of love that similarly requires one to surrender into the bodily

rhythms of breathing, aching, crying, resisting, and dissolving. As I therefore wrote in an online creative writing workshop that I attended during Autumn 2021 (and which was facilitated by Lori, who I engage in the next and final interview encounter):

*pray to grief*

*pray to that force that ruptures you  
starting in the center  
and  
tearing you into tiny shrivels while you stand there  
in its presence*

*pray to that earthquake that  
shackles the ground beneath you  
and  
rips down all the solid brick buildings  
that you thought you had built up around*

*pray as grief forces you down on your knees  
face in the dirt  
and  
struggling to breathe  
pray*

*pray as tears flow  
pray as bodies tremble  
pray as souls open (from the author's personal notes)*

I have with this arrived at a felt sense of ease that is imperfectly dynamic, deeply relational, curiously undefinable, and powerfully paradoxical, arising, transforming, and emerging anew through and within our embodied-relational experiences. It is hence a felt sense of ease that is not always explicitly realized at the foreground of our lives yet that is always available through our ever-present potentials for tapping into and manifesting this ease through and within our ongoing ways of co-being, co-becoming, co-knowing, and co-relating. Hanh does in this regard discuss the mindful art and practice of 'being peace' (Hanh 1987), using words such as 'calm', 'relaxed', 'presence', 'smile', 'breathing', 'enjoy', and 'happiness' to describe this art and practice. He contends how this capacity to 'be peace' unfolds through and as an ongoing, mindful, and engaged awareness of and relationship with

what *is* - what Hanh, in a Buddhist context, also refers to as meditation - without, importantly, (over)identifying with this *is* as the final and static truth of existence. Rather, what *is* is continuously also changing and transforming. ‘To be peace’, therefore, is the simultaneous capacity to authentically and compassionately engage the suffering that arises ‘within’ and ‘around’ *and* the capacity to authentically and empathically engage how this “suffering is not enough (Hanh 1987: 3)” because “life (...) is also filled with many wonders, like the blue sky, the sunshine, the eyes of a baby. To suffer is [therefore] not enough. We must also be in touch with the wonders of life. They are within us and all around us, everywhere, anytime (Hanh 1987: 3).” It is in other words a dance that arises neither through denial of suffering nor through (over)identification with it, but through dynamically co-living the many dualities and so-called ‘opposites’ of life in a paradoxical dance of living. It thus emerges as a mindful presence with, awareness of, and radical acceptance of what *is* (see also Brach 2003) while also daring to choose a certain direction to dance based upon an intuitive sense of what is life affirmative. As such, it is an embodied experience of ease and a felt sense of peaces that can perhaps be summed up through this powerful poem by Hanh:

Breathing in, I calm my body and mind.  
Breathing out, I smile.  
Dwelling in the present moment  
I know this is the only moment (Hanh 1987: 5).

#### **4.6.3 *I hela mitt fulla register som människa* (In my Whole, Full Register as Human)**

Moving with this to deeper explore what Stefan also *verbally* expresses during our interview encounter - especially related to Open Floor/conscious dance and movement - I emphasize, to begin with, two dynamics/stories that are spoken related to two different interview questions, yet which I see as meaningfully interconnected. They center around the aspect of being able to, as Stefan phrases it, “*vara hela [sitt] fulla register som människa*” (to be [his] whole, full register as human), thus bringing attention towards a central dynamic that is intimately involved in the felt sense of ease discussed. It is interestingly the case even when Stefan

himself never uses the word ‘ease’ - or any Swedish counterpart - during our meeting, as it is, I affirm, first and foremost a *felt sense* of ease that is emerging.

Stefan does in this sense, at one point, share an image/story from his younger days when he would, in Stefan’s words, “walk around with [his] headphones” when he “was... younger, also when [he] lived at home with [his] parents,” and then sometimes go downstairs “when the whole family had gone to bed” and “put on [his] headphones... and just, you know, stand there in the darkness and just dance.” This, in turn, would make him “feel good” and he could “sleep much better afterwards.”

*Stefan: when I was... younger, also when I lived at home with my parents, then I remember that I would always walk around with my headphones... (Stefan puts his two hands to the sides of his head as if to imitate how he had his headphones on). (...) And sometimes when the whole family had gone to bed (...) then I would go downstairs, [because] all the bedrooms were upstairs, so I went downstairs, put on my headphones (he moves both his hands to the sides of his head again)... and just (he starts to dance enthusiastically in front of me while he changes the intensity of his voice to a faster and more insisting way of speaking), you know, stand there in the darkness and just dance.<sup>113</sup>*

Stefan returns to a less outwardly expressive body position, calming his voice back into a more ‘standard’ way of speaking.

*Stefan: and afterwards, then I can... looking with the eyes and the knowledge that I have today, that what I did there... is that I self-regulated myself in the darkness with the dance. Because I... had thoughts and feelings... that I did not quite understand. But I just sensed this that when I dance, I feel good... and I can sleep much better afterwards.<sup>114</sup>*

Interconnected with this image of a younger Stefan who found an intuitive way to ‘feel better’ and ‘regulate himself’ through going downstairs and dance alone in the darkness with his headphones on, emerges a dynamic that Stefan later expresses when I ask him about how he has experienced that dancing (in the context of conscious dance and movement, including yet not limited to Open Floor) “has changed [him]... as a human? Both... in relationship to [him]self and then in relationship to... [his] surroundings?” As a response,

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<sup>113</sup> när jag var... yngre, också när jag bodde hemma med mina föräldrar, så kommer jag ihåg att jag gick alltid med min[a] (...) hörlurar... (---). (...) Och ibland när hela familjen hade gått och lagt sig (...) då gick jag ned, [--] alla sovrum låg på överplan, så gick jag ner i underplanet, satt på mig mina hörlurar (---)... och bara (---) du vet så här, stod i mörkret och bara så här dansade.

<sup>114</sup> Och efteråt så kan jag... titta med dom ögonen och kunskapen jag har i dag, att det jag gjorde där... det var att jag självreglerande mig själv i mörkret med dansen. För att jag... hade tankar och känslor... som jag inte riktigt förstod. Men jag bara kände så här, när jag dansar så mår jag bra... och jag kan sova mycket bättre efteråt.



Stefan expresses how Open Floor and other forms of conscious dance and movement practices (especially also the 5Rhythms practice) have, amongst others, helped him tap into a larger sense of “*acceptans*” (acceptance) and “*trygghet*” (safety/trust) in relation to his many-faceted experiences. It has with this supported him to be and become his “whole, full register as human,” which includes his manifold dynamics “from the very... subtle, vulnerable... to the very, like... (...) primary... (...) sweaty, physical, kind of.” It has with this helped him unfold a sense of “*kongruens*” (congruence) in relation to himself and his surroundings, feeling how he is “not only fragmented but that there is also (...) a congruence and a wholeness and a red thread (...) within [him].”

**Hanne:** *um... so, how have you experienced that to dance [in the context of conscious dance and movement, including yet not limited to Open Floor]... has changed you... as a human? Both in relationship to yourself and then in relationship to... your surroundings?<sup>115</sup>*

**Stefan:** *(...) yes... eh... (Stefan looks up and to the side as if to think about what to express) how has it changed me? (He looks straight at me again). It has changed me... in... many different ways. Eh... number one, that I... have felt... safer/more trusting<sup>116</sup> in my own body, more acceptance for my own body, (...) more safety/trust and acceptance for my feelings<sup>117</sup>.*

Stefan settles into a short pause while he inhales and lingers on an ‘eh’ sound. It appears to me that he is thinking about what to say next.

**Stefan:** *and then, since I have been dancing for so many years (...) then it is also this kind of more and more layers that have (...) revealed itself to me the more I have danced, and read, and trained/educated myself (Stefan inhales while he opens his eyes and his face in a more visible manner. He smiles and conveys an authentic expression of enthusiasm and joy). So then my awareness have grown.<sup>118</sup>*

A bit later, he proceed.

**Stefan:** *eh... yes, but also that I have found that “family” (Stefan makes himself the sign for the quotation marks with his fingers in the air), a community, which I have felt at home in. And also... safe... (...) to be... my whole, full (he puts his arms wide open and out to the*

<sup>115</sup> *Em... altså hvordan har du opplevd at det å danse [---]... har forandret deg... som menneske? Både... i forhold til deg selv og da i forhold til... omgivelsene dine?*

<sup>116</sup> The Swedish word ‘tryggare’, which Stefan uses above, literally translates ‘safer’. Yet, it can also, especially in the context that Stefan here speaks it, be translated as the experience and process of feeling more trust/authentic confidence in something/someone, for example in oneself/one’s body as Stefan emphasizes. See also my further engagement with the word(s) ‘trygg(het)’ - ‘safe(ty)’ - in the coming chapter 4.6.4.

<sup>117</sup> *ja... eh... (---) hur har det förändrat mig? Det har förändrat mig... på... massor med olika sätt. Eh... nummer ett, att jag... har känt mig... tryggare i min egen kropp, mer acceptans för min egen kropp, (...) större trygghet och acceptans för mina känslor.*

<sup>118</sup> *och sen, eftersom jag höll på med dans i så många år (...) så är det ju också så här lager på lager som har liksom (...) uppenbarat sig ju mer jag har dansat, och läst, och utbildat mig (---). Så har jo min medvetenhet blivit större.*

sides) register as human. That means... from the very... subtle, vulnerable (Stefan bends forwards and towards the screen, seemingly lessening the (virtual) space between us), to the very, like... (he leans backwards again, moving his hands out and to the sides in an arm-flexing and fist-tensing movement, non-verbally communicating words such as ‘(em)power’ and ‘strength’) (...) primary... (...) sweaty, physical, kind of. To (...) dare... (...) be my whole register of that, so that (...) I don’t only become this: ‘yes, this is my safety zone and I am always a good boy’, kind of. Rather that, hm...<sup>119</sup>

Stefan starts to lean his upper body even further towards the back, stretching his arms wide open to the sides before he with a calm “hm, så” (hm, so) and a small nod with his head brings his whole body back into center, looking straight at me. Only after he has settled back into this physical center line, does he continue his speaking.

*And (...) that I can see on many parts. For example, my movement register, that it has widened. My feeling register, that it is has widened. (...) And when I widen myself, then I can also discover how I also have a lot more... acceptance, compassion, understanding... for others. Because... the more (...) self-knowledge, or deep knowledge about myself that I have, and feel safe... in my whole register, then I can sense how I can also become a better human, friend, and facilitator Because... I can... have compassion, medkänsla<sup>120</sup>, understanding. And I feel... more... safe, and grounded, and curious even if somebody is angry, or sad, or scared, or... do you understand? That it...<sup>121</sup>*

Stefan starts to repeat some of his physical movement from above. He leans backwards, opens his arms and expresses a short and calm “ja” (yes) before he proceeds.

**Stefan:** *so a self-relationship, a self-trust... (...) from the dance (Stefan pauses his words for some time). (...) I remember when I started... I remember when I... was young. Then it was also like this that I felt, like maybe all teenagers, that I did not feel so... comfortable with my... (he starts to pull parts of his t-shirt, making a facial expression that communicates discomfort and awkwardness. It seems to me that he is speaking about not feeling fully comfortable with his physical body and ‘in his own skin’ - hence the pulling of his t-shirt - even if he does not explicitly say the word ‘body’) I was after all quite tall... (...), and, you know... (he inhales). But (...) when I danced then I felt like this... (Stefan begins to move his body in different directions, fluidly and lightly expanding the physical space that he is touching with his presence) I felt powerful, I felt strong, I felt... (he pauses his words while he looks shortly to the side, inhaling) kind of okey. I felt (...) it was a perspective from within... an experience of that... I am doing good, I am okey. As I am, kind of, like that.<sup>122</sup>*

<sup>119</sup> ja men också att jag har hittat den “familjen” (---), en community, som jag har känt mig hemma i. Och också... trygg i... (...) att vara... hela mitt fulla (---) register som människa. Det vill säga... från det där väldigt... subtila, sårbara (---), till det här väldigt så här... (---) (...) ursprungliga... (...) svettiga, fysiska, liksom. Att (...) våga kunna... (...) vara hela mitt register av det, så att (...) jag inte bara blir så här: ja, här är min trygghetszon, och jag är alltid en duktig pojke, liksom, så. Utan at, hm...

<sup>120</sup> Stefan first speaks the English word ‘compassion’ above and then the Swedish word ‘medkänsla’, which both means the same.

<sup>121</sup> Och (...) det kan jag se på många delar. Dels mitt rörelser register, att det har breddats. Mitt känsleregister, att det har breddats. (...) Och när jag breddar mig själv... så kan jag också upptäcka att jag också har mycket mer... acceptans, medkänsla, förståelse... för andra. För... ju mer... (...) självkunskap, eller självkänedom jag har för mig själv, och känner mig trygg i hela mitt register, då känner jag att jag också kan bli en bättre medmänniska, vän, och facilitator. För att... jag kan... ha compassion, medkänsla, förståelse. Och känner mig... mer... trygg, och grundad, och nyfiken, även om någon är arg, eller ledsen, eller rädd, eller... förstår du? Att det...

<sup>122</sup> Så en självkänsla, ett självförtroende... (...) av dansen (---). (...) Jag kommer ihåg när jag började... jag kommer ihåg när jag... var ung. Så var det också så här att jag kände, som vi kanske alla tonåringar, att jag kände mig inte så här... bekväm med min... (---) jag var ju ganska lång... (...) och du vet så här... (---) Men (...) när jag dansade så kände jag mig så här... (---) jag kände mig kraftfull, jag kände mig stark, jag kände mig... (--

Some sentences further down, Stefan rounds up his answer with these interesting words:

***Stefan:** so in some ways... to... (...) round it up, then it is kind of that I can also feel a congruence... (...) and (...) with congruence I mean (...) a wholeness of that... the body, feelings, thoughts, the subtle dimensions, that it... is connected, that there is a red thread, that I... I am not only splintered but that there also exists a congruence and a wholeness and a red thread in... within me. (...) Then, of course, life can also do so that I feel splintered, but then... the dance can kind of be like a calibration back into a centering. (...) And then I feel safer, and more present, and can make completely different... decisions and choices, when I am back [into center].<sup>123</sup>*

There are in this regard several noteworthy dynamics that I can highlight from these sharings of Stefan above. I want however to bring special attention to a curious presence of space(iousness) that I can sense emerges through and within what Stefan is speaking, which I find highly relevant as regards the felt sense of ease that we are together exploring. Stefan talks in this respect about an expansive movement of ‘*att bredda(ts)*’ (to widen) and of being and becoming his “whole, full register as human” (*hela [s]itt fulle register som människa*), which he expresses has amongst others manifested through his dance and movement practice. In my understanding, he emphasizes with this an ongoing capacity to broaden and widen both the physical and energetic space that he is touching with his presence, imperfectly welcoming all what *is* through a continuous yet ever-relevant practice of radical (self)acceptance (Brach 2003) and empathic/compassionate non-(self)judgment. At the same time, he appears to communicate a more intimate and ‘held’ movement of contraction, for example related to how he would, in his childhood home, go downstairs to dance and self-regulate by himself while being protected by, wrapped into, and held by the soft boundaries of darkness, solitude, and his headphones. Additionally, he voices how he has, through his dance and movement practice, also “found that ‘family’, a community” (*hittat den “familjen”, en community*) that

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-) liksom okej. Jag kände (...) det var ett inifrån perspektiv... av en upplevelse så här... jag mår bra, jag är okej, som jag är, liksom, så.

<sup>123</sup> Så på något sätt... för att... (...) runda av det där, så är det liksom att jag kan också känna en kongruens... (...) och (...) med kongruens menar jag (...) helhet av att... kroppen, känslor, tankar, det subtila, att det... hänger ihop, att det finns en röd tråd, att jag... jag inte bara är splittrad utan att det också att det finns en kongruens och helhet och en röd tråd i... i mig. (...) Sen så klart så kan jo livet göra att jag känner mig splittrad, men där... kan liksom dansen vara den som en kalibrering tillbaka till en centrering. (...) Och då känner jag mig mer trygg, och närvarande, och kan ta helt andra... beslut, och val, när jag är tillbaka [---].

allows him to feel so “at home” (*hemma*) that he can be and become his “whole, full register as human” (*hela [s]itt fulle register som människa*). Once again, he thus articulates a form of (relational) container and ‘boundary’, which allows him to so safe that he can keep expressing and expanding his ongoing life dance. Furthermore, he conveys a comparable ‘inner’ feeling of holding and stability, expressing how he has emerged a sense of feeling ‘powerful’ (*kraftfull*), ‘strong’ (*stark*), and even just ‘okey’ (*okej*) through dancing and moving. Towards the end of his sharing, I believe he is explicitly referring to this ‘inner’ holding and stability as “a congruence and a wholeness and a red thread (...) within [him].”

This presence of space(iousness) that I emphasize emerges in this manner as a multidimensional sense of space(iousness) that is simultaneously expansive, opening, and infinite *as well as* bounded, contracting, and limited. What I mean by this can perhaps be better explained by returning to the previously discussed interplay between boundaries and openness engaged in relation to facilitated spaces, which concerns how “the facilitative space is safe [and, I add, transformative] because it is equally open as it is bounded (Koppensteiner 2020: 170).” In a similar vein, the space(iousness) that I notice through and within what Stefan is sharing is a multifaceted dance of space(iousness) that runs simultaneously ‘inwards’ and ‘outwards’. It is moreover a space(iousness) that can *both* expand *and* contract the lived ‘boundaries’ of this space(iousness) according to what is needed and helpful. In this context, I highlight the curious Norwegian verb ‘*å romme*’ (‘*att rymma*’ in Swedish), as well as how this verb symbolically and physically connects to a process of breathing.

‘*Å romme*’ can literally be translated as ‘to contain’. Yet, the core noun that the Norwegian verb derives from, ‘*rom*’, carries a vital dual connotation. ‘*Rom*’ signifies both the English word ‘room’ (as in the concrete rooms with (often) four walls in a house) and the English word ‘space/room’ (as in a more abstract, non-concrete, and/or symbolic space/room, for example ‘the room/space to breathe’, ‘the room/space for emotions’). Interestingly,

'rom(*met*)' can also refer to 'outer space', with the noun '*verdensrommet*' (outer space) literally translating 'the world room/space'. As such, when I speak about being able to '*romme*' something in Norwegian - an emotion, an experience, a dynamic of myself, a dynamic of another - it carries a more multifaceted sensation as compared to when I say the English verb 'to contain', signifying aspects related to 'accommodating', 'having capacity for', 'managing to stay present with'. This is because '*å romme*' implies to both be solid, bounded, and stable enough so that I can, symbolically, 'have the four walls' of a room to keep me upright, contained, and secure. At the same time, it implies to be wide, open, and even infinitely expanding (enough) - referring also to the connotation of outer space - so that I can continuously be and become all of what *is* without having to 'push' certain aspects away because my 'inner room' is too small. In other words, when I can '*romme*' something, I am simultaneously bounded and open, contained and wide, limited and infinite - all depending upon what is needed and helpful in different moments and contexts.

To highlight the significance of this space(ious) capacity to '*romme*', I bring attention to what Hungarian American psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi discusses as the experience of flow. He defines flow as a "state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it (Csikszentmihalyi 2022: 4)." He thus interconnects flow with an endeavor of doing - a process of being fully engaged in an activity - which, according to Csikszentmihalyi, is an affirmative means to actively help create order, meaning, and purpose within the otherwise rather 'chaotic' and 'random' dance of life. Flow, therefore, is "as close to what is usually meant by happiness as anything else we can conceivably imagine (Csikszentmihalyi 2022: 4)." This is because it can help emerge an empowered "sense of mastery - or perhaps better, a sense of *participation* in determining the content of [one's] life (Csikszentmihalyi 2022: 4. Emphasis in original)."

Although I agree with Csikszentmihalyi regarding how flow can be a life-sustaining, meaning-creating, and joy-unfolding process - I have for example myself encountered countless moments of flow on the dance floor - I bring attention to how the space(ious) capacity to '*romme*' also needs to move beyond and be broader than the experience of flow alone. This is because '*å romme*' also implies to welcome and include those inevitable experiences that are *not* felt as flow throughout the course of a life. There is hence an unconditional sense of radical space(iousness) that differentiates Csikszentmihalyi's flow from the felt sense of that Stefan and I are together exploring, making the felt sense of ease that we are exploring more about being, relating, and continuously becoming rather than (always) about doing. I therefore - while recognizing the importance of moments that temporarily allows one to 'forget' and not focus on the pains life - argue that the baseline of ease cannot be to engage doing as means to *not* feel what is painful and difficult. Rather, the baseline of ease is to radically accept and include all what *is* so that this *is* can also keep transforming and becoming anew. It is, as argued, through this ongoing and non-judgmental acceptance of what *is* that humans, as embodied wholes, can keep transforming, healing, and changing (see Siegel 2011, Allione 2008, Badenoch 2017, Brach 2003, van der Kolk 2014).

I did in this context once hear from a friend of mine that he had asked one of his teachers (a person who I consider deeply practiced in the embodiment field) about how this teacher would know whether a choice/decision would be the 'right' one for him to follow in a specific context. My friend was in this sense not talking about a moral and universal 'right' or 'wrong' but about a contextualized 'right' or 'wrong' that was relevant for this specific teacher in this specific spacemoment. What the teacher answered is an aspect that has stuck with me. The teacher responded something along the lines of that he would 'simply' tune into the experience of his breath and notice how his flow of breathing was moving with more or less constriction/difficulty or with more or less space(iousness) and ease. The more

space(iousness) and ease - even if there was excitement and anticipation involved - the more confident he would feel that a decision/choice was 'right'. The more constriction and difficulty, the less likely he would feel that a decision/choice was life affirmative.

When I personally manage to tap into the felt sense of ease that Stefan and I are together exploring - a (space)ious sense of ease that can '*romme*' everything that might come up - I am in a comparable vein able to breathe in a manner that manifests space(iousness) and ease rather than (more) difficulty and constriction. It does not mean that my process of breathing is always calm and settled, as '*å romme*' necessarily also implies to '*romme*' the potential fear, excitement, anger, and other activating dynamics that might emerge. The difference, however, lies in *how* I am able to encounter these dynamics that unfold. When I can '*romme*' them, I can approach them through unconditional acceptance, openness, curiosity, respect, and even love *also* when they are challenging, painful, scary, and hard. I can with this feel a simultaneous movement of stability and flexibility, openness and boundedness, seemingly arising with and through my breath, unfolding, amongst others, as a deep, embodied trust and confidence in my own, other's, and life's capacities to dynamically receive, dance with, engage, digest, survive, and transform these different dynamics that evolve. Through this unconditional sense of confidence and trust, I am already changing my process of breathing, flowing with more ease and less constriction as I - symbolically and physically - expand and contract the space inside my lungs to intuitively accommodate, respond to, welcome, encapsulate, support, and surround the air that is needed rather than forcing the air to 'fit' into an inflexible lung form. I am with this constantly creating a dynamic lung space that is neither too small nor too big but fully responsive to the ongoing flow of air that animates through me before it organically re-emerges to dance with, as, and through my surroundings again. On a personal level, this space(ious) manner of breathing is a crucial experience of, ingredient in, and practice for a felt sense of ease - and ultimately also,

I concur, the embodied dance of peaces. In the poetic words of Rumi, it can be phrased as the space(ious) capacity to keep creating a space that can ‘welcome and entertain them all’ even when a dynamic and/or experience might not have been invited to come knock on my door.

This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they’re a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond (Rumi quoted in Barks 1997: 109).

Much can in this respect be said about the deep philosophical implications and meanings that are involved in such a space(ious) process of breathing. According to Indian Sufi teacher Hazrat Inayat Khan: “the subject of breath is the deepest of all the subjects with which mysticism or philosophy is concerned, because breath is the most important thing in life (Inayat Khan 2005: para. 1).” Breath is in this sense, as discussed, a ‘great connector’ (Koppensteiner 2020: 114), unfolding as an *intra-*, *inter-*, and *transpersonal* process of lived, embodied (re)connection. This embodied (re)connection is furthermore, as stated, “partly automatic and partly voluntary (Fogel 2009: 228),” arising at the intersection between what humans, as embodied wholes, can notice and become aware of and what humans, as embodied wholes, can actively influence and transform. In this regard, professor of philosophy at the Science and Research Center in Koper, Slovenia, Lenart Škof, and doctoral



candidate in philosophy at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, Petri Berndtson, dedicate an edited volume to a 'respiratory philosophy'. They argue for a re-discovery and re-engagement of breath in so-called 'Western' manners of thinking.

Within the Western [philosophical] tradition, the almost universal forgetting of breathing made it possible for the dangerous idea of dualism to become a paradigm (...). It could be argued that modern philosophy's dualism is impossible if the starting principle of philosophizing is the experience of breathing, as breathing perpetually intertwines the self, the body, and the world (Škof and Berndtson 2018: xii).

Bringing in this context this philosophical understanding of breath as a great, embodied re(connector) into my engagement with breathing as a felt experience of ease, I emphasize one of my personal encounters with this felt sense of ease and the space(ious) process of breathing that it interconnects with. I do it because it can help underline some vital and meaningful insights as regards embodied peaces. One of my most profound encounters with this felt sense of ease happened in this sense in November 2020 during, perhaps surprisingly, the last days before my father passed away. My father had, as mentioned, suffered the devastating effects of dementia for many years at this point and it was therefore clear to my family and I that he was ready to leave this world and relieve himself of his suffering when the first signs of his dying appeared. I thus travelled to the city where my parents lived to be present for these final days of my father's life. In these final days, I experienced a deep and embodied sense of ease. It was not an ecstatic, joyful, or animated sense of ease but an existential acceptance of what *was*. This helped me in turn unfold a lived sense of space(iousness) both 'within' and 'around', which allowed me to be fully present with what was unfolding also when I experienced an immense form of pain - grief - that sometimes made me feel like a physical piece of my heart was actually being torn away. Crucially however, I managed to meet this pain with empathy, love, care, and compassion - both for my father and for myself - which helped me breath with, as, in, and through this pain with a loving sense of ease rather than with resistance and struggle. I realized with this - in a

full, embodied manner - how the biggest act of love that I could do for my father and myself was to let him go, yet how I also needed to be fully and authentically present for this process as long as it needed to complete. During the five days that this process lasted, therefore, I leaned upon a space(ious) process of breathing to carry me in and through this intimate dance of painfully letting go that I was living.

What my space(ious) process of breathing helped me manifest was in this sense, on the one hand, a stable sense of solidity, strength, and support that made it possible to be present with and engage the reality that my father was dying. It thus helped me breathe in a manner that solidified the air at my center, bringing it deep down into my lower abdomen to condense and gather simultaneously at my ground and at my core. Through this felt experience of solidifying, centering, and grounding, I could unfold an empathic and compassionate process of strength that helped made me stay healingly present with myself and my father as we said our loving, yet painful, non-verbal goodbyes to each other (my father was not able to speak at this point).

On the other hand, my space(ious) process of breathing helped me manifest an affirmative sense of expansion, dissolving, and boundless opening so that I could, at the same time, lean into a larger sense of presence that could unconditionally carry a form of meaning and trust for me in a time where I could not fully emerge this meaning and trust alone. I did in this context - when I was not physically present at my father's side - often, similarly to Stefan in his childhood home, put on my headphones and moved however and wherever I needed to the specific piece of music that I had chosen. This was the song 'A Alhamdollelah' by the Persian Sufi band *Ahura* (2013), which was a song that allowed me tap into the only word from that song that I understood - *alhamdolellah*, which means 'gratitude' - without needing to understand the rest of the verbal content that the song contained. A not-fully-understandable sense of gratitude was rather enough by itself. My moving did in this respect,

in difference from Stefan in his childhood home, not happen through an explicit process of dancing but through a timeless sense of walking through whatever smaller and larger woods that I could find in which all I needed to do was to be, to exist, to breathe, to cry, to listen, to rest, to let go, to expand, to acknowledge, to accept, to widen, to feel space, to keep walking on. My process of breathing therefore also unfolded qualitatively differently from the solidifying process of breathing that I have described above. It also emerged as an expansive sense of infinitely melting together with and becoming my surroundings - without losing touch with my personal existence - breathing through a porous experience of being that truly gives meaning to the question previously highlighted related to Koppensteiner: “when does the breath I inhale cease to be environment and become a part of me? At which point exactly is the breath I exhale no longer mine (Koppensteiner 2020: 3).” In this experience, I *was* and I was becoming everything and nothing at the same time, expanding into a presence that was much larger than me yet that simultaneously also was me in this process of breathing that I was becoming. It is in this regard rather difficult to describe this expansive experience of breathing that I embodied, yet I highlight how it was an essential ingredient for me being able to encounter and be with the process of my father dying through a felt sense of healing acceptance, ease, and space(ious) capacity to ‘*romme*’ rather than through a rigid sense of resistance, struggle, denial, or overwhelm.

What I with this first and foremost want to highlight, both through my ongoing discussion in this section and through my personal sharing above, is *not* how a felt sense of ease and a space(ious) process of breathing need to involve such a deep, existential encounter with, for example, suffering, illness, dying, and letting go. Rather, the point is to (re)underline how space(iousness) and ease do not need to be excluded from such experiences ‘simply’ because they are difficult. Rather, space(iousness) and ease can co-exist with, move alongside, emerge out of, and even be and become such experiences as

individuals and collectives allow themselves to dance with, through, and as the dynamic unfolding of their lives. Said differently, the animating dance of life's expansion and contraction - which is ultimately what the space(ious) process of breathing is about - can and do manifest *both* in so-called 'smaller' moments of everyday experience (of ups and of downs) *and* in so-called 'larger' life-altering events (whether they are full of joy or deeply challenging). It is in the final instance the essence of the dance that matters the most. This is an essence that I, perhaps in the absence of an even more eloquently meaningful word, might choose to call 'love'. What this 'love' might or might not be, however, is an aspect that I return to with more depth in the later section 4.6.6.

The felt sense of ease that Stefan and I are together exploring is in this manner not a felt sense of ease that comes with a fixed recipe or that emerges out of a specific or 'correct' way of embodying this ease. Rather, it is, as highlighted, a wider, more dynamic, and more inclusive process of ease that cannot be universally defined yet that needs to be embodied and lived in ever-unfolding manners. It is therefore a felt sense of ease that is not always readily described in words yet that can perhaps be incompletely summed up as the ongoing ability to actively tune into the present moment and out of this attunement 'simply' do one's best to move in a manner that appears life affirmative both for oneself and for one's surroundings. This, I underline, is a process, practice, and art that I consider crucial for embodied peaces. In this respect, the felt sense of ease that Stefan and I are together exploring can evolve in a myriad of ways; as a solid sense of 'inner-outer' stability, as an open sense of infinite expansion, as a surrender into what *is* and what can become, as something completely different that I have not touched upon yet. An underlying core, however, is that this felt sense of ease needs to rest upon a basic presence of empathy, compassion, care, and acceptance rather than upon judgement and exclusion. It is amongst others because of this that I have chosen to share a personal encounter with this ease that occurred in an immensely painful

time of my life above. This ease that I lived did not evolve *despite* of what was happening but *because* I actively related to and participated in this happening through love, care, empathy, and compassion. I did therefore not need to ‘push’ this happening away but could openly include it with and as the pain that it was. Ultimately, I might even describe these last space(ious) days before my father’s passing as some of the most peaceful days in my life. It might sound strange, yet it also serves to tell something profoundly important about the paradoxical fabric that embodied peaces are.

Norwegian medical doctor, researcher, and author Audun Myskja argues in this context how the art of finding ‘*ro*’ - which is a Norwegian word that directly translates ‘calm(ness)’ yet that also strongly associates with a lived experience of (‘inner’) peace (the common phrase ‘*fred og ro*’ means for example, directly translated, ‘peace and calm’) - has to do with, in its essence, “a deep anchoring (with)in ourselves (Myskja 2020: 26. Translated from Norwegian by author) <sup>124</sup>.” In my understanding, the felt sense of ease that Stefan and I are together exploring emerges similarly. It has to do with, in its essence, a deep, loving trust in and care for our interconnected and imperfect existences as embodied wholes on this planet, manifesting as a lived (re)connection with ourselves, with each other, and with the dance of life. It hence emerges as an empathic and compassionate sense of involvement and care for *how* our many-faceted lives unfold, expressing itself as a dynamic endeavor of presence, connection, and, as touched upon, *love* that runs simultaneously ‘inwards’ and ‘outwards’. Myskja contends in this respect how ‘*ro*’ is connected to a sense of creative power - a ‘*skaperkraft*’ in Norwegian (Myskja 2020: 205) - which is an experience of oneself being able to participate in and help co-emerge the ever-unfolding dances that together make up our lives. For me, a conscious relationship to a space(ious) process of breathing is in this sense a core way through which I can tap into this felt sense of ease and this active

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<sup>124</sup> *en dyp forankring i oss selv.*

experience of peaces, helping me to experience this ease and these peaces as they emerge *and* co-cultivate and co-facilitate for this ease and these peaces to keep emerging anew. I notice how I might in this context, throughout the research, already have engaged several different ways in which I Open Floor can potentially help one tap into such a felt sense of ease and lived experience of peaces, focusing on aspects such as ongoing dynamism, radical (self)acceptance, non-judgmental inclusion, embodied (re)connection, and more. What I have not yet fully engaged, however, concerns another aspect that Stefan helps highlights, which I believe is key for an embodied peace web. This is the aspect that I in the following, based upon what Stefan expresses, have chosen to name ‘the endeavor of (also) languaging’.

#### 4.6.4 The Endeavor of (Also) Languaging

As another response to my before-mentioned question regarding how “dancing [in the context of conscious dance and movement, including yet not limited to Open Floor]... has changed [him]... as a human? Both... in relationship to [him]self and then in relationship to... [his] surroundings?”, Stefan mentions how Open Floor and other forms of conscious dance and movement practices have helped him “*få ett språk för*” (get a language for) and “*sätta ord... på*” (put words... to) his “physical sensations, to [his] feelings, to... kind of what is happening in the body” and also “on this other level of... of the subtle, invisible... whatever we call it (...): soul, spirit, *själ*<sup>125</sup>, God, nature.” When I a bit later ask him about “what that does with [him], this aspect of being able to have (...) a language for it?”, Stefan shares how it makes him become more “*begriplig*” (comprehensible) for himself and for others, creating “*mening och förståelse*” (meaning and understanding) that makes him feel “*mer trygg*” (safer/ more secure/ more trusting/more (self)confident/more anchored within himself<sup>126</sup>).

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<sup>125</sup> Stefan uses both the English word ‘soul’ and the Swedish word ‘*själ*’, which both means the same.

<sup>126</sup> As touched upon, the Swedish word ‘*trygg*’ (safe), which is also identical in Norwegian, carries a more multifaceted connotation than the English word ‘safe’ alone. It additionally refers to an ‘inner’ form of solidity,

**Stefan:** *and also (...) I think that... (...) to be able to put words... to... physical sensations, to my feelings, to... kind of what is happening in the body, to, to get a language for that.<sup>127</sup>*

Stefan lets his two arms rest in front of him while he pauses his words. As he has been speaking, his hands have moved actively around to support his verbal expressions, forming, amongst others, a pointed shape by putting all the fingers on each hand together to create a form that makes me think about the German word ‘*Fingerspitzengefühl*’ (an intuitive sense of something, a precise sensitivity to what is going on. Literally translated: ‘fingertip feeling’). When he now starts to speak again, his hands quickly leave their resting position to continue supporting his verbal flow of words.

**Stefan:** *(...) and also on this other level of... of the subtle, invisible... whatever we call it (...): soul, spirit, själ<sup>128</sup>... God, nature. So... (...) to also be able to articulate that. To also be able to make that embodied. Eh... to be able to... (Stefan moves his eyes to the side as if to ‘look for’ the ‘right’ word to speak. The Swedish word ‘trygg’ [safe/secure/trusting/(self)confident] seems to come his way) feel trygg in also this more subtle, vulnerable... sphere.<sup>129</sup>*

A bit later, I ask Stefan about what this capacity for languaging does with him:

**Hanne:** *um... so one thing you said, it was about this to have, to get a language... for these more subtle... parts of life. Um... (I begin to laugh at myself, realizing how I am about to express an unintended verbal pun) can you manage to put words to... what that does with you, this aspect of being able to have a language for it?<sup>130</sup>*

Stefan immediately responds by re-asking my question to himself: “what it does with me?<sup>131</sup>”, he ponders. After some time, he seems to encounter the adequate words to express a meaningful answer.

**Stefan:** *yes but... I believe that... (...) what it does with me, as I just said, it makes... me... more comprehensible for myself but also more comprehensible for others (Stefan inhales). And (...) then I feel safer/more trusting/more secure/more anchored within myself [trygg]. It creates meaning and understanding... that... that (...) there exists something more (...) multidimensional. (...) [It, the subtle parts of life] becomes (...) more concrete. And when it becomes more concrete, then it also becomes more graspable/easier to relate with. It creates more meaning, understanding, and trygghet [safety/trust]<sup>132</sup>.*

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(self)confidence, (self)trust, (self)anchoring, and similar, thus making ‘trygg’ encompass both the English word ‘safe’ and the English word ‘(self)secure’, yet also at times move beyond both ‘safe’ and ‘secure’ to denote words such as ‘trust/trusting’, ‘(self)confidence/(self)confident’, ‘anchored (within oneself)’, and similar.

<sup>127</sup> *och också (...) tänker jag att... (...) att kunna sätta ord... på... fysiska förnimmelser, på mina känslor, på... liksom det som händer i kroppen, att, att få ett språk för det.*

<sup>128</sup> See footnote 125 above.

<sup>129</sup> *och också på den här andra nivån av... av det subtila, osynliga... vad vi nu kallar det (...): soul, spirit, själ... Gud, natur. Alltså... (...) att också kunna artikulera det. Att också kunna förkroppsliga det. Eh... att kunna... (-- -) bli trygg... (...) i den också mer subtila, sårbara... sfären.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ehm... alltså en ting du sa, det var å ha, få et språk... for de her mer subtile... delene av livet. Ehm... (---) klarer du å sette ord på... hva det gjør med deg, det å kunne ha et språk for det?*

<sup>131</sup> *Vad det gör med mig?*

<sup>132</sup> *Jo men... jag tror att... (...) vad det gör med mig, som jag precis sa, att det gör... mig... mer begriplig för mig själv men också mer begriplig för andra (---). Och (...) då känner jag mig mer trygg. Det skapar mening och förståelse... att... att (...) det finns något mer (...) mångdimensionellt. (...) [---] blir (...) mer konkret. Och när det blir mer konkret, då blir det också mer hanterbart för mig. Det skapar mer mening, förståelse och trygghet [---].*

I have in this respect previously underlined Gendlin's philosophy of language in relation to the narrative methodological choices of this research. At this point, I re-emphasize Gendlin's philosophies connected to what Stefan expresses, contending how Gendlin's arguments can help highlight how it is not indifferent which words that one uses but how words are active participants within the meaning-making processes that one unfolds. Words, thus, help co-create new and different meanings together with and through the embodied experiences that one lives, emerging as meaning-imbued dynamics that, to paraphrase Gendlin, can help 'carry the felt sense forward' when the words that one uses 'make sense' (Gendlin 1997, 2004, 2007). What this implies in the context of this research is how words and languaging do not need to be approached as a so-called 'opposite' of embodied engagement but can be tapped into as affirmative possibilities within embodied engagement that can help co-create new and different processes of holistic sense-making. It can with this become an embodied word dance that, instead of being separated from sensuous experience, is deeply "rooted and entwined in bodily feeling (Williamson 2018: 85)," putting "body and language in a flowing responsive relationship (Williamson 2018: 85)." As underlined:

language and bodily experience cannot simply be reduced to one another - both require one another as partners in a conversation, and both phases (embodying and languaging) constitute both limits and freedoms in this conversation - hopefully, a productive tension. Sometimes, the bodily depth of what one has lived through is 'more than words can say'. Yet such experience 'looks for' words. Sometimes, the language of what things mean changes bodily experience, and the words disappear; in and out of language. Embodying language; languaging the body: each has its day in an ongoing process (Todres 2007: 33-34).

Taking this as a basic ground and starting point for how I understand Stefan's sharings regarding the ability to "*sätta ord... på*" (put words... to) and "*få ett språk för*" (get a language for) above, I emphasize some of the words/phrases explicitly that he uses to describe what this capacity for languaging does with him. I notice in this regard the before-mentioned Swedish word(s) '*trygg/trygghet*', as well as the Swedish words/phrases '*mer begriplig*' (more comprehensible), '*mening och förståelse*' (meaning and understanding),



*'mer konkret'* (more concrete), and *'mer hanterbart'* (more manageable/easier to relate with). In my understanding, many of these words/phrases connect to an ongoing endeavor of *understanding*; an effort, attempt, and commitment to deeper, clearer, and in a more authentic way see and be seen, hear and be heard, touch and be touched – both by oneself and by each other. Koppensteiner contends in this context how “understanding (...) means to be close to, to be in the proximity of, ultimately to be in the presence and midst of (...) [It] is a form of knowing that is relational (...) (Koppensteiner 2020: 47).” Trying to, incompletely and dynamically, make oneself “more comprehensible” both for oneself and, as Stefan expresses it, “also (...) for others” (*också (...) för andra*), as well as to, incompletely and dynamically, trying to make the “subtle... parts of life” become “more concrete” and “more graspable/easier to relate with,” is in this sense, I contend, part and parcel of such a relational endeavor of understanding. It is an effort and commitment to unfold more “meaning and understanding” through *also* (rather than only) employing a verbal realm of meaning-making.

I have in this sense emphasized how these words/phrases were originally spoken in Swedish rather than in English during our interview encounter. It is, as touched upon, significant related to how Stefan and I, as Scandinavian mother tongue speakers, relationally receive and engage the embodied meanings and felt senses that move within and are unfolded out of these phrases/words. In this context, I underline especially the last word that I have brought attention to above. It is the Swedish, and Norwegian, word *'trygg(het)'*, which, as stated, directly translates 'safe(ty)'. Vitality however, *'trygg(het)'* carries, in Swedish and Norwegian alike, a slightly wider connotation and use as compared to the English word 'safe(ty)' alone. It also more explicitly connects to an 'inner' sense of (empowered) solidity, (self)anchoring, comfort (with oneself/others/life), authentic trust and (self)confidence, in addition to the more 'common' English connotation of a physical and/or emotional presence of relational/situational safety. *'Trygg(het)'* can thus, as engaged, encompass both the

English word ‘safe(ty)’ and the English word ‘(self)secure’ yet can also move beyond both ‘safe’ and ‘secure’ to be used in instances where I would in English often use other words instead, including ‘trust/trusting’, ‘(self)confident’, ‘(self)anchored’, ‘solid’, ‘comfortable’, and more. As an example, I can in Norwegian say that ‘*jeg kjenner meg/er trygg på meg selv*’ (literally translated: ‘I feel/am safe on myself’) to express an authentic experience of self-trust, while I can, in a similar vein, say that ‘*jeg kjenner meg/er trygg på andre/livet*’ (literally translated: ‘I feel/am safe on others/life’) to express an authentic experience of trust/confidence/comfort with and towards others/life.

The Swedish-Norwegian word(s) ‘*trygg(het)*’ can with this - in addition to a relationally/situationally focused experience of ‘safety’ and/or ‘security’ - also more readily and directly associate with a process and source of ‘safety’ that emerges simultaneously from ‘within’ and ‘around’. Furthermore, it can more readily and directly interconnect with the space(ious) capacity to ‘*romme*’ and the anchored sense of ‘*ro*’ discussed. As such, ‘*trygg(het)*’ is *both* about the relational context and situation *and*, as Myskja contends it related to ‘*ro*’, about “a deep anchoring (with)in ourselves (Myskja 2020: 26. Translated from Norwegian by author)<sup>133</sup>.” This is also visible in Myskja’s subtitle to his book: the art of ‘*ro*’ is, amongst others, about the capacity to “encounter life with peace of mind, *trygghet*, and trust (Myskja 2020: cover page. Translated from Norwegian by author)<sup>134</sup>.” In English, I would probably have chosen to translate ‘*trygghet*’ with ‘self-trust’ in this context, while I would, interestingly, have specified how the word ‘*tillit*’ (which literally translates ‘trust’) primarily, in this case, refers to a more ‘outer’ dimension of trust; the trust that runs towards others and/or life. Language, hence, noticeably changes the felt tonalities and meanings to how I relationally receive what is being written and/or said.

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<sup>133</sup> *en dyp forankring i oss selv.*

<sup>134</sup> *møte livet med sinnsro, trygghet, og tillit.*

Norwegian author and special education teacher with a personal story of suffering from, moving through, and meaningfully transforming strong and inhibiting anxiety, Kristine Czilling Tørå (2023), explores in this regard a felt sense of *trygghet* related to her process of anxiety healing and transformation. Even though I am not researching anxiety in this research, I find that some of her points are highly interesting to engage. First, Tørå describes, amongst others, *trygghet* as a solid enough sense of ‘inner fundament’ - a ‘*grunnmur*’ in Norwegian, which is also the word used to express the fundament of a building/house. This ‘fundament’ helps us “take care of ourselves (...) (Tørå 2023: 185. Translated from Norwegian by author)<sup>135</sup>,” manifesting as a solid enough sense of ‘inner’ base and ground out of which life’s many wonderful, scary, challenging, rewarding, vulnerable, and more processes can be affirmatively lived. Sufficient *trygghet* is hence, according to Tørå, the key ingredient out of which healing and transformation can occur because sufficient *trygghet* is - as also previously discussed related to Porges (2011, 2017) - the vital antidote that helps calm and (co)regulate the agitated state of emergency that is activated during intense anxiety experiences (see also Fogel 2009, van der Kolk 2014, Badenoch 2017, Siegel 2011).

At the same time, Tørå underlines how this felt sense of *trygghet* is relationally co-unfolded through, with, and out of the relational experiences that one has lived and/or is living (Tørå 2023: 80-85). Tørå mainly connects it to (early) childhood experiences, yet I highlight how even though (early) childhood experiences are vital (see Badenoch 2017, Lewis et al. 2000, Fogel 2009) it is also relevant related to the many later experiences that one encounters. Why else would for example Tørå herself dedicate an entire book to exploring how a felt sense of *trygghet* can continuously be (re)cultivated, (re)unfolded, and (re)manifested? With this dynamic reality in mind, I emphasize how Tørå brings attention to the many past and present experiences that one carries as regards feeling sufficiently

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<sup>135</sup> *ta vare på oss selv (...).*

validated, seen, acknowledged, and received, intertwining *trygghet* with the relational experience (or lack thereof) of feeling “unconditionally loved for being you” (Tørå 2023: 82. Translated from Norwegian by author)<sup>136</sup>.” To put it in more explicit connection with my previous discussion of *understanding*: a sufficiently felt sense of *trygghet* is intertwined with an ‘inner-outer’ endeavor of understanding; the endeavor to deeper, clearer, and in a more authentic way see and be seen, hear and be heard, touch and be touched. As Hanh puts it in relation to love, “to love is to recognize; to be loved is to be recognized (Hanh 2006: 13).” Understanding, therefore, “is the essence of love (Hanh 2006: 2).”

The fact that Stefan uses the Swedish word(s) ‘*trygg(het)*’ to describe what an ability for languaging does with him above makes me in this context acutely aware of how equally important the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ is. It is not to say that the English words ‘safe(ty)’ and/or ‘(self)secure’ cannot carry a similar ‘inner-outer’ connotation, yet the difference lies in how explicitly, directly, and almost unavoidably clear that the Swedish/Norwegian word(s) connects me to it. Attempting to translate ‘*trygg(het)*’ in the quotes from Stefan above was in this context not truly possible for me without emphasizing this ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ realm. By allowing the Swedish/Norwegian word(s) ‘*trygg(het)*’ to resonate through me, I have therefore allowed my understanding to be ‘carried forward’ into an even more vibrant and piercing awareness regarding how endeavors of seeing and being seen, hearing and being heard, touching and being touched *needs*, on equal and interdependent terms, both the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’. This is because, as continuously emphasized, embodied wholes can only change, transform, heal, and unfold anew through this interpenetrating ‘inner-outer’ reality that they are. If we, as individuals and collectives, constantly neglect our embodied powers to cultivate understanding ‘within’- our abilities to see and be seen, hear and be heard, touch and be touched (by) ourselves - we disregard our amazingly powerful capacities

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<sup>136</sup> *ubetinget elsket for å være deg.*

to heal and transform even if and when our surroundings might not be as supportive and understanding as we need. At the same time, if we neglect our interconnected ‘withouts’, we disregard our deep interdependence and hence advocate a form of seeing ourselves and each other that, rather violently I propose, points towards our so-called ‘individual independence’ and ‘innate essences and traits’ as *the* explanation and solution for how our lives unfold as they do and/or can unfold differently than they do. In my understanding, neither of these are useful because embodied peaces are about honoring, respecting, and engaging our many-faceted processes of ‘inner-outer’ co-being, co-becoming, co-knowing, and co-relating.

#### **4.6.5 The Trauma of Voicelessness, and the Power of (Re)Creating Community**

To in this context engage a concrete example for how such an ‘inner-outer’ co-engagement is crucial when it comes to endeavors of (or lack of) understanding, as well as lived capacities to (or lack of) language, I highlight a last example from my personal life related to the difficult process of grief that I have emphasized related to my father. This example helps make visible how powerful and transformative the presence, as well as how excruciating and painful the absence, of ‘words that make sense’ (Gendlin 1997, 2004, 2007) can be. One of the most challenging dynamics that I lived during my grieving process was in this respect a deep experience of lack of understanding both ‘within’ and ‘without’. It was at the same time connected to how I felt insufficiently able to understand myself *and* to how it felt challenging for much of my surroundings to sufficiently understand me. Amongst others, my family and I had in this regard to endure more than five years in deep uncertainty before we finally received a diagnosis in relation to my father’s illness - dementia - that made any form of sense. I therefore lived years in what seemed like a bottomless hole of chaos and confusion, exhausting myself in the endeavor of trying to create meaning and sense out of this rather meaningless experience that I was living. It did furthermore not help that I, as touched upon related to Marisu, began to experience how many of the relational spaces in my life appeared

less and less able to include me in this overwhelm, chaos, and confusion that I was living, as I began to manifest less as the normally ‘enthusiastic’, ‘passionate’, ‘functional’, ‘happy’, and ‘centered’ me and more as a ‘chaotic’, ‘dysfunctional’, ‘exhausted’, ‘hopeless’, ‘agitated’, and ‘resigned’ me. Without, as mentioned, believing that this dynamic was in any way purposefully or ill intended, I underline how it was immensely hurtful and isolating, sending shock waves through my entire system of trusting and of feeling *trygg* - in relation to myself, in relation to my surroundings, and in relation to the vibrant dance of life.

One of the key ingredients that I can now, in hindsight, recognize was often missing as regards this insufficient capacity to understand both ‘within’ and ‘around’ was an ongoing ability to openly and authentically encounter what I was (trying to) express(ing) through my chaos, confusion and pain with an attitude of empathic and compassionate curiosity rather than with an avoidant presence of fear or with a pre-conceived idea regarding what my words (or lack of words) ‘must be about’. What I mean by this can perhaps be best explained by looking at one of the main words that my surroundings and I were, noticeably, not-yet engaging. This was the main word ‘grief’, which I, on personal level, did not even recognize could be a meaningful word to name and incompletely describe my experiences before years into my grieving process. British end of life doula Kristina Taeë writes in this respect, in relation to the process of anticipatory grief (which is the process of grief that can occur before someone physically dies), how “most of us think of grief as something which happens *after* a death. In fact, grief can start a long time before someone dies, but this is often not acknowledged, talked about or even understood (Taeë 2020: para 1. Emphasis in original).” For me, this dynamic was additionally complicated by the fact that the first official diagnoses that my family and I received in relation to my father - including depression, anxiety, and Parkinson’s disease - were all diagnoses that are often understood as something that you, to re-quote what I was continuously told, ‘die with, not from’. In this

context, I struggled to encounter the sufficient relational support and understanding that I needed to also myself dare trust the intuitive ‘inner’ sense that I carried as regards how what I was experiencing was in fact a painful process of grief.

I can in this sense recognize many of the dynamics that Lederach and Lederach write about in relation to processes of voice and voicelessness. They describe them as processes of vibrations that either move or do not move to touch and be touched by the interconnected presences of ourselves and each other (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 65-68). Voice and voicelessness, thus, have to do with whether or not one’s ongoing, dynamic vibrations feel authentically received and resonated with by a relational community and world. Even though Lederach and Lederach write about these processes primary connected to violent and protracted social conflicts, there is something profoundly shared that move to touch me when I read. I realize how I often felt painfully voiceless during much of my grieving process. I felt voiceless because I could not satisfactorily understand and express the situation that I was living - neither to myself nor to others - *and* because I could not feel the sufficient presence of vibrations around that could authentically receive and understand me in this chaotic dance of yet-to-be-named grief that I was embodying. In this regard, I started feeling myself as more and more isolated and alone, sensing how I was *not* truly seen, *not* truly heard, and, ultimately, that I did *not truly matter*.

Importantly nevertheless, through this deeply challenging process of isolation, chaos, and confusion, I also had access to some vital embodied resources that helped me survive and ultimately transform this experience that I was living. Amongst others, I could lean upon the unconditional presence and support of my husband, who courageously dared the endeavor of staying present with me and listening also in my suffering and my pain. Through this open and compassionate presence, my husband helped me feel seen, validated, included, cared for, and heard *also* in my confusion and my chaos. He hence helped me endeavor a process of,

ultimately, *understanding* even if I could not yet adequately express my experience in words. To say it differently, my husband helped me remember how I *still mattered*, supporting me to feel *trygg* enough so that I could keep trusting my deepest sense of belonging even if I could not fully access this sense of belonging in my everyday existence. As Myskja contends related to ‘*ro*’: “all life needs to be seen and met, to be given *livsrom* [space and room to live] (Myska 2020: 204. Translated from Norwegian by author<sup>137</sup>).” For me, this unconditional presence that my husband offered was such an essential experience of *livsrom* that I needed.

At the same time, and vital for this research, as first a trainee of Open Floor International and later as an Open Floor teacher, I had access to the many embodied resources that are embedded in this practice that I am studying/teaching. It was importantly not only valid for when I was practicing *on* the dance floor but also for my *off*-the-dance-floor life. I have in this respect, in relation to Tamara, previously discussed how a key dynamic behind this on-and-off-the-dance-floor integration relates to how processes of ‘mind’ can work alongside, with, and through embodied experience rather than against it. It hence unfolds as a holistic endeavor of meaning-making. In my case, it was particularly pertinent related to how Open Floor offered me the embodied presence of and engagement with *also* (rather than only) words, unfolding an affirmative interplay between words and experience that helped me navigate the challenging landscape of what-I-did-not-yet-name-grief. To explain, through the many words that are embedded in the Open Floor curriculum - including, for example, ‘ground’, ‘active & settle’, ‘hunger for belonging’, ‘pause’, ‘emotional body’ ‘release’, and more<sup>138</sup> - I had access to a whole tapestry of embodied resources that could help me endeavor a lived process of (self)understanding both on and off the dance floor even if this process was still lacking the main word ‘grief’. As such, it was almost as if I had access to the details of a map whose outlines were still blurry and fuzzy.

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<sup>137</sup> *alt liv trenger å bli sett og møtt, få livsrom.*

<sup>138</sup> See chapter 3 for the in-depth engagement with the Open Floor curriculum.



Even if I could not (yet) name my experience ‘grief’, therefore, I could, for example, notice how I lacked a fundamental experience of ‘ground’ in my life and how I thus needed to steer much of my movements towards possibilities for manifesting this ‘ground’ anew. Similarly, I could recognize how my ‘hunger for belonging’ was severely undernourished and how I therefore needed to seek towards new potentials for nourishing this ‘hunger for belonging’ again. In this manner, I could slowly find empathic and compassionate ways to care for, see, and acknowledge my ongoing experience even if I still felt painfully lost as regards the larger picture that I was living. I could therefore, as touched upon, feel an unconditional sense of presence - this time emerging from ‘within’ - that helped me remember how I *still mattered* also in my suffering, my chaos, and my pain.

What was in this context crucial concerns how these words are for me by now, after years of Open Floor practice, richly imbued with meaning and experience rather than purely intellectual and abstract sounds. This is because I have time after time practiced, explored, and lived how these words can move and not move me, make sense and not make sense for me, unfold and not unfold through me, *on* the dance floor. When I therefore now tap into them *off* the dance floor, I am not merely entertaining them on a cognitive level but deeply involved in a holistic process of sense making. As professor of integral and transpersonal psychology with a focus on somatics Don Hanlon Johnson argues: it is not words “that betray our deeper experiences, but banal words, readymade words, truisms, slogans, ethereal generalized words (Johnson 2015: xiv).” Words that are engaged through an embodied endeavor of living, therefore, can, as emphasized, help ‘carry’ our experiences ‘forward’ into realms of meaning that ‘make sense’ (Gendlin 1997, 2004, 2007). As Johnson expresses it: “if you look at the way we actually feel a need for words, it is because they do thing in the way that gestures do. We speak and we write because we bump up against problems that stump us and we need help. The words carry us further into getting it (Johnson 2015: xvi).”

For me, moving with and through the different words/phrases in the Open Floor curriculum was in this respect such a movement towards a deeper, embodied ‘getting it’ that Johnson highlights. It happened because this lived exploration of my experience helped me to, as underlined, see myself with more empathy, care, compassion, and love even if I could not (yet) transform the larger situation that I was living. As previously underlined related to Hanh (2006), this authentic form of (self)listening was already transformative because it, as touched upon, helped me understand how to relate to myself and my surroundings in more affirmative ways *and* because understanding was the very ‘action’ that I, as an embodied whole, needed for healing and transformation to occur.

My ongoing engagement with these so-called ‘small’ and ‘detailed-focused’ words from the Open Floor curriculum was therefore ultimately also a way for me to gradually emerge into a larger embodied understanding of the wider word ‘grief’. It was in this context as if my many small and ongoing experiences were constantly ‘trying their way’ (Gendlin 1997) towards a larger word that could meaningfully name the overall wholeness of what I was living. Through patiently tuning into my experience with empathy, care, compassion, and intention to understand, I could gradually emerge a confident, solid, trusting, and empowered - *trygg* - understanding of my experience as, exactly, grief. This was in turn, to build on Johnson above, deeply *needed* because I needed this word to express, to understand, to be understood, to make sense, to be made sense of, to see, to be seen, to matter, to keep becoming. It did in this respect not immediately change or drastically alter my situation, yet the embodied naming of my experience was a crucial dimension for me being able to, imperfectly and dynamically, heal, transform, and make sense of my experiences again. With it, I could slowly emerge a renewed sense of safety and trust - *trygghet* - in relation to myself, in relation to my surroundings, and in relation to the vibrant dance of life.

I can in this sense vividly remember the moment when I first knew and fundamentally dared trust how ‘grief’ was indeed the word that I needed to name my experience. It was a few months before my father received his diagnosis of dementia, and hence some months before I cognitively knew that he was, in fact, slowly disappearing. I was in Southern France, and I was standing in front of an international group of Open Floor dancers and movers in a workshop that was facilitated amongst others by Lori (who I, as mentioned, engage in the last and coming interview encounter). We had just engaged a creative writing exercise with the prompt ‘what I am not saying’. I had written a text to my father. As I spoke the final words of this text out loud to the workshop participants to be witnessed - “*jeg skal la deg gå*/I am going to let you go” (first in Norwegian, then in English) - it was the moment when I knew, on a deep, embodied level, how ‘grief’ was the most meaningful, healing, transformative, yet also most painful word that I could use to describe my experience. I cried as I spoke my sentence, struggling to gather the breath that I needed yet managing to speak it nonetheless.

**Det jeg ikke sier (What I Am Not Saying)**

*Det jeg ikke sier er hvor glad jeg er i deg.* (What I am not saying is how much I care about you.)

*Hvorfor* (Why)

*så langt i fra?* (so far away?)

*Ordene stopper.* (The words stop.)

*Det jeg ikke sier er hvor redd jeg er.* (What I am not saying is how afraid I am.)

*Er du redd?* (Are you afraid?)

*Pust.* (Breathe.)

*Jeg klarer meg.* (I will manage.)

*Det jeg ikke sier er at jeg savner deg.* (What I am not saying is that I miss you.)

*Ute av stand* (Without capacity)

*til å nå gjennom på en måte.* (to reach through in a way.)

*Kontakt?* (Contact?)

*Jeg tror du er borte.* (I think you are gone.)

*Far og datter.* (Father and daughter.)

*Jeg skal la deg gå.* (I am going to let you go.) (from the author’s personal notes)

Lederach and Lederach emphasize in this regard how this metaphor and experience of voicelessness can also move into and touch the landscape of ‘the unspeakable’. This is the

collective and individual experiences that reach “below and beyond words (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 66),” unfolded by trauma, violence, terror, overwhelming suffering, oppression, or similar, which thus shatter normal frames of meaning-making and hence defy usual ways of engaging words. Nevertheless, these experiences ‘look for’ (Todres 2007: 33) words that can help one make sense (see also van der Kolk 2014, Pennebaker and Chung 2007, Krantz and Pennebaker 2007). Lederach and Lederach describe it as “the search for finding ways to name experiences and events that are beyond words and comprehension (2010: 66),” underlining how trauma, violence, and similar can bring about a feeling of losing touch with one’s sense of personhood and humanity because the often accompanying sense of voicelessness can manifest “the experience of being numb, without a capacity to feel, to touch or to be in touch (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 66).” This, in turn, often “deadens, numbs, and silences life (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 66).” In a similar vein, Kaur emphasizes how experiences of violence and trauma can emerge a rupture in both individual and collective lives, unfolding a painful, gaping hole that “swallows up language, memory, and meaning and leaves us in a scarred and stripped landscape (Kaur 2022: 33).” A process of healing, therefore, is amongst others about learning “to say what is unsayable” through telling “a story about the violence [and, I add, the trauma] to make sense of it (Kaur 2022: 33)” because this ‘telling’ is what returns “us to the public realm where grieving is possible (Kaur 2022: 33).” Through engaging an imperfect “act of naming the violence [and, I add, the trauma] and grieve loss in community (Kaur 2022: 33),” we can find ways to turn the hole “into a wound that can heal (Kaur 2022: 33).” We can find

words where words were absent before and, as a result, be(...) able to share your deepest pain and deepest feelings with another human being. This is one of most profound experiences we can have, and such resonance, in which hitherto unspoken words can be discovered, uttered, and received, is fundamental to healing the isolation of trauma (...). Communicating fully is the opposite of being traumatized (van der Kolk 2014: 235).

Even though these experiences of trauma, violence, overwhelming, fear, suffering, and similar are with this deeply challenging and painstakingly hard to meaningfully express - believe me, it has taken me amounts of patience, care, and (self)compassion to write this part of the research - I re-underline how healing is, in the words of van der Kolk, often “paved with words, carefully assembled, piece by piece, until the whole story can be revealed (van der Kolk 2014: 232).” Humans can in this sense not “remain in (...) silence and survive (Kaur 2022: 33)” because this ongoing process of silencing closes our dynamic capacities to feel the presence of ourselves, each other, and the vibrant dance of life. As previously discussed related to Imraan, the experience of trauma is often deeply intertwined with the felt sense of being isolated and alone rather than only/primarily with the event that unfolded the potential for trauma to begin with. As engaged: “the essence of trauma isn’t events, but aloneness within them (Badenoch 2017: 25).”

Cohen (2022) argues in this respect how processes of belonging - the experience of *not* being alone but embedded in a safe enough, supportive enough, and nourishing enough relational space - is one of the most basic needs that humans, as embodied wholes, carry. He builds, amongst others, on Baumeister and Leary (1995) to contend how the need for belonging is so fundamental that individuals and collectives often (un)consciously activate strong physiological and emotional survival responses if and when they perceive that this need is threatened (Cohen 2022: 31). One can in this context furthermore imagine how the felt experience of, on the other hand, sensing oneself as authentically included in a relational space of resonance, empathy, and support is vital not only for trauma to heal but also for preventing trauma from embedding. As Badenoch highlights: “when we come into contact with suffering in the presence of another, even when the depth of pain is very great, the very experience of relatedness - the nurturance we humans most need - prepares a space in which meaning and hope may emerge (Badenoch 2017: 11).” Bringing this discussion more

explicitly (back) into the aspect of languaging and of “put(ting) words... to” our experiences, I (re)underline how the above-discussed art of ‘telling our stories’ and of ‘naming’ what we are living has importantly nothing to do with a rigid demand or universal ‘Truth’ regarding how, if, when, and where we ‘should’ express our experiences to ourselves and each other<sup>139</sup>. Rather, it has to do with the potentially powerful, healing, and transformative process of *(re)connection* - with ourselves, with each other, and with the vibrant dance of life. Said differently, the power of *also* (rather than only) languaging has to do with an ongoing practice, art, blessing, and challenge of being and becoming a relational, embodied whole who unfolds and thrives, suffers and heals, transforms and (re)manifests, not through isolation and *independence* but through dynamic *interdependence* and *interconnection*.

#### **4.6.6 On Love, a Felt Sense of Ease, and on the Art and Practice of Embodying Peaces**

I realize with this how I need to end my discussion of this subchapter with a short and imperfect reflection regarding what it might potentially be that dynamically moves behind, continuously (re)unfolds, and imperfectly weaves together this ever-emerging dance of our ongoing interconnection. What is it that allows me and others to tap into the intuitive, felt sense of ease and the affirmative engagement of our ‘inner-outer’ co-existences that I have discussed together with Stefan in this subchapter? Without claiming that I know a full answer to these questions, I bring attention to a word that I have mentioned before. It is the word ‘love’, which - even though I am aware carries multiple meanings and can also be associated with a (overly) romanticizing and/or naïve interpretation - is a word that I find meaningful to engage. Brazilian peace researcher Egidio de Bustamante expresses (in relation to love as a topic in and for peace studies) how “love is not something that one can simply ignore or take

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<sup>139</sup> On the contrary, I re-underline how there are “societal, cultural, even economic barriers to vulnerability” and how vulnerability can therefore “come at a price and sometimes the risks outweigh the benefits (McKenna and Brantmeier in Brantmeier and McKenna 2020: 8).” A process of languaging and words thus needs to be seen in close relationship with how, when, if, where, and under which circumstances it is helpful and safe enough to express and/or not express (see also van der Kolk 2014, Badenoch 2014, Levine 2010). As Yoder highlights: “there are differences of opinion as to how much detail is needed for healing and whether delving too deeply into the memory or experience [of the trauma] is necessary - or even harmful (Yoder 2005: 53).”

out of oneself (...). Love spills over everything one does. If [one] understand[s] love as commitment and service for humankind [and, I add, for life], (...) love is (...) fundamental (...) (de Bustamante 2021: 1).” In an even more forthright way, Curle states how “it is through love that we find peace (Curle quoted in Woodhouse and Lederach 2016: 200).”

Curle emphasizes in this respect how love can be seen as a ‘bridge’ that helps one connect into a sensation of (‘inner’) peace that is not negative in its expression - as in the absence of something, such as tension and/or action - but a positive expression that affirmatively contains “untroubled joy, strength and bliss out of which will come very effective and purposeful action when it is required (Curle quoted in Woodhouse and Lederach 2016: 203).” He furthermore associates it with a deep and ongoing process and source of knowledge, energy, vitality, and wisdom; an affirmative dance that is “within us and all creatures (...) which [co]regulate our growth and (...) enable us to adjust to changed conditions, mobilize our defenses against disease and respond (...) to [in my words: what is both beyond and ‘within’ us<sup>140</sup>] (Curle quoted in Woodhouse and Lederach 2016: 208).” This affirmative dance is in this sense also metaphorically seen “as an ocean in which our [strict and separate] individualities are dissolved, so that we are in touch with - indeed, perhaps form a part of - all other human beings [as well as, I add, more-than-human beings and the vibrant dance of life] (Curle quoted in Woodhouse and Lederach 2016: 208).”

From a Sikh perspective, Kaur comparably highlights a practice of ‘revolutionary love’. It is the commitment and effort to actively and affirmatively embody love “as a form of *sweet labor*: fierce, bloody, imperfect, and life-giving - a choice we make again and again (...) the choice to labor for *others*, for our *opponents*, and for *ourselves* in order to transform the world (...) (Kaur 2022: xxii. Emphasis in original).” This active and affirmative ‘inner-outer’ practice, however, begins from the more ‘quiet’ and ‘still’ practice of *wonder*; the

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<sup>140</sup> Curle’s words in this quote are: “respond, as in the case of menstruation, to extra-terrestrial forces.”

willingness to openly encounter dynamics in oneself and each other through an empathic and compassionate lens of “you are a part of me I do not yet know (Kaur 2022: xxii).” It thus starts from the basic yet potentially transformative recognition regarding how others and oneself are not separate but interpenetrating, manifesting revolutionary love as a practice that runs simultaneously ‘inwards’ and ‘outwards’ because, as Kaur articulates it, “loving only ourselves is escapism; loving only our opponents is self-loathing; loving only others is ineffective. All three practices together make love revolutionary (Kaur 2022: xxii).”

Taking therefore these two different yet interrelated perspectives on love as a form of (re)connective energy, source, process, and practice that allows one to both become aware of and engage the dynamic interweaving between our ‘inners’ and ‘outers’; an energy, process, practice, and source that helps one tap into and affirm our ongoing processes of ‘inner-outer’ co-unfolding, I begin to sense how this process of love is key not only for my ongoing discussion of a felt sense of ease in this subchapter but also for my overall discussion of embodied peaces at large. This (re)connective process is, as I experience and understand it, an underlying fabric that helps me and others, as individuals and as collectives, tap into way of engaging our interconnected lives through a felt sense of guidance, spontaneous direction, and, ultimately, ease as we come to understand, on a deep, embodied level, *how* we can affirmatively move within the ‘inner-outer’ spaces of our lives. As such, love is, I propose, an essential source of transformative energy (see also Joyce 2023); a process of *(re)connection* that help us (re)emerge a dynamic dance of embodied peaces - a dance that I, in relation to Rivi, have described as a ‘dance of multiples’ that do not come with any fixed recipes or pre-defined choreographies - as a dance that is not random or ‘left to chance’ but deeply involved in a continuous endeavor of *caring about* how our multidimensional ‘inner-outer’ co-existences unfold. As Curle contends: “peace (...) is a condition in which people are united,



in which those who were separated are reconciled, in which they are joined in love (Curle quoted in Woodhouse and Lederach 2016: 209).”

What is in this context important to emphasize concerns how love is not apolitical. On the contrary, “a love ethic presupposes that everyone has the right to be free, to live fully and well (hooks 2001: 87)” because “love and abuse cannot coexist. Abuse and neglect are, by definition, the opposites of nurturance and care (hooks 2001: 6).” hooks emphasizes in this regard the definition of love as highlighted by US American psychiatrist Morgan Scott Peck concerning how love is “the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth (...) an act of will - namely, both an intention and an action. (...). We do not have to love. We choose to love (Peck quoted in hooks 2001: 4-5).” Love, therefore, is not a way to escape the realities of embodied existence but a way to engage how these realities continuously impact both others and oneself in more or less helpful or harmful ways. We therefore also carry a responsibility and a need to keep transforming these shared realities, manifesting love as, precisely, *a choice* that “engages *all* our emotions (Kaur 2022: xxii. Emphasis in original)” because “joy is the gift of love. Grief is the price of love. Anger protects that which is loved. And when we think we have reached our limit, wonder is what returns us to love (Kaur 2022: xxii).”

As a final perspective to highlight in relation to this short and imperfect reflection on love, therefore, I underline what Hanh (1997) describes as a Buddhist notion of ‘true love’. This process is not only about the compassionate and empathic *intention* to relieve suffering (*karuna*), engage loving-kindness (*maitri*), manifest joy (*mudita*), and unfold freedom/equanimity (*upeksha*), but also the lived capacity to actively help co-emerge these processes in embodied lives. As such, “even if your intention is to love (...) your love might make [someone] suffer (Hanh 1997: 2)” because this intention needs to be accompanied by the lived capacity to make this love a felt and experienced reality. In other words, “if you are

suffering all the time, if you cry all the time, and if you make the person you love cry, this is not really love (Hanh 1997: 4)” because “when you love, you bring freedom to the person you love (Hanh 1997: 4)” - as well as, I add, to yourself.

With this, to end my discussion of this subchapter, Stefan and I have together explored a curious, embodied, and felt sense of ease that is not one-dimensional or perfectly grasped in words but diverse, many-faceted, relational, and ever-transforming. It is hence a felt sense of ease that continuously arises through and within a process of paradoxical inclusion where the effort and the ease, the joy and the pain, the radical acceptance and the active engagement can co-exist and co-unfold each other. It is therefore an ease that is not limited to a narrow idea regarding what is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, ‘good’ or ‘bad’, ‘easeful’ or ‘challenging’, but a felt sense of ease that can always be accessed and lived as an experienced reality and embodied potentiality. It is in this sense, as Stefan expresses it, a felt sense of ease that includes our “whole, full register as human[s]” through amongst others, in my words, a spacious capacity to ‘*romme*’ and to breathe in, with, and through all what *is* and all what can become. As an example, it can include the heart wrenching and soul aching process of saying goodbye to someone who you love. In addition, this felt sense of ease do often, I confirm, need to involve a (re)connective effort to also (rather than only) “put words... to” our experiences because this ongoing process of meaningful languaging is a powerful way to help us, as individuals and as collectives, (re)manifest the relational spaces of community, love, understanding, and sufficient ‘inner-outer’ safety - *trygghet* - that we need. In this respect, the final (re)connective process that I have discussed above - ‘love’ - is in my understanding an underlying and essential process for embodied peaces. It therefore also re-emerges under both similar and different names during my upcoming and final engagement with the interview encounter with Lori in the following.

#### **4.7 Lori - Integrating**

Lori is a creative, down to earth, and energetic US American Open Floor teacher in her mid 60's who lives and teaches in the San Francisco Bay Area in California. More than that, she is one of the founders of Open Floor International and is therefore, along with her partner Kathy (Altman) and their colleagues and friends Andrea Juhan and Vic Cooper, one of the four original bodies, hearts, minds, and souls who first came together and began the process of co-creating Open Floor. The four of them furthermore “called... in (...) other very, very... strong teachers [the founding members of Open Floor International] (...) and said: ‘will you be our thinktank? And... meet once a week for eight weeks and see: (...) are we gonna start something?’” Open Floor hence began to unfold, and the rest, as Lori voices it, “is history<sup>141</sup>.”

Lori is in this sense one of the most senior Open Floor teachers that there are. This is true both as regards how she was part of co-creating Open Floor International and the Open Floor curriculum as well as regards how she has been and still is dedicating a lot of time and energy to keep the practice and organization running and developing. As of Spring 2022, she is for example a working member of three different Open Floor International working circles, including ‘the top circle/board of directors’, ‘the general circle’, and ‘the finance circle’ (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Our People’). Additionally, Lori has been teaching and practicing the 5Rhythms extensively, having worked “side by side” with Gabrielle Roth (the founder of 5Rhythms) “for 30 years (...) plus.” Her total experience in conscious dance and movement therefore by now span more than four decades.

Lori emphasizes in this regard how the first time that she encountered conscious dance and movement, which happened through the 5Rhythms practice, was when she was 26 years old. Her partner Kathy was “studying with Gabrielle Roth” and ended up loving the 5Rhythms so much that it became central for her life. Kathy therefore told Lori that “if we’re

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<sup>141</sup> See my discussion throughout chapter 3 for the in-depth story behind Open Floor, including how Lori and the other founders and founding members of Open Floor International began to unfold the practice as well as the close historical connection that Open Floor shares with Gabrielle Roth and the 5Rhythms practice.

going to be together, you have to get this [5Rhythms/conscious dance and movement] (...) you have to at least understand it.” In this context, Lori joined her first 5Rhythms workshop with some “reticence,” as she “had a little bit of the dance wound” from earlier (unfolded amongst others by experiences of moving not so coordinated in front of mirrors in aerobics classes where “you got to look at yourself (...) and judge yourself, of course”). When Lori came to her first 5Rhythms workshop, however, something changed. She “stepped onto that [dance] floor... and [she] knew [she] had come home. It was a completely... visceral, full-bodied, full-hearted... full-spirited... (...) [she is] home.” It happened as mentioned when she was 26. Now, “[she is] 66... and [she hasn’t] stopped” since. From this point onwards Lori therefore became, as she herself phrases it, “a 5Rhythms junkie.”

Not long after this first, and in many ways life-changing, workshop experience, both Lori and Kathy started to work closely with Gabrielle Roth herself. It began when Roth one day approached Kathy during a 5Rhythms workshop, “who... they had never even spoken before (...). But... [she, Roth] came up to [Kathy]... (...) and said... ‘someone told me that you produce events... and I need someone to manage my business. Would you, do you want to do it?’” At this point - and Lori expresses this with a heartfelt smile embedded into her words - “Kathy almost fainted on the spot.” Then, “as good life would have it (...) [Lori] (...) ended [her] job [almost at the same time] (...) and... [Kathy and Lori] said ‘well, let’s do it together’.” From here onwards, they hence both helped co-manage and teach the 5Rhythms practice until Roth passed away in 2012. They supported with this the 5Rhythms to grow “around the world” by getting “out there” and bringing it “to... all corners of the earth<sup>142</sup>.” Lori has in this sense, at least before the Covid-19 pandemic made it difficult to travel for a while, been teaching both the 5Rhythms and Open Floor within diverse geographical

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<sup>142</sup> Because the 5Rhythms is older than Open Floor (it began to unfold in the 1960’s whereas Open Floor was, as mentioned, founded in 2013/2014), the global reach of 5Rhythms is undoubtedly wider than Open Floor. As of March 2022, I find 5Rhythms teachers listed in 62 different countries (5Rhythms 2022: ‘Find a Teacher’) whereas I find Open Floor teachers in 32 different countries (Open Floor International 2018: ‘Find a Teacher’).

contexts. Her teaching experience therefore traverses both countries and continents, even if her primarily place of teaching is in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Moving with this fast-forward to how I first met Lori - referring as mentioned to chapter 3 for the in-depth story behind how Lori and the other founders and founding members began to co-unfold Open Floor - I highlight how Lori's seniority and deep experience is also visible in the first encounter that we lived. It happened when I was training to become an Open Floor teacher in Montpellier, Southern France from 2017-2018. Lori was present during this training program together with Kathy Altman and Andrea Juhan to train us - the teachers-in-training - to become new Open Floor teachers. There are in this respect two core dynamics that I associate with Lori from this teacher-training experience.

First, Lori visibly embodied dynamics of imperfection and lightheartedness in her teaching. She gracefully laughed with herself if she made a 'mistake', she dynamically encountered what arose rather than needing to control or fully know where the dance and movement was going, she organically tapped into a lighthearted sense of humor that helped both challenging and easy topics be danced. Second, Lori was perhaps the teacher who the most visibly and enthusiastically cheered me on as I during the teacher-training program attempted to understand how I could tap into Open Floor as a resource for peaces. She therefore, maybe more than she aware of, became vital in my sense of feeling supported and encouraged to keep emerging the specific research and teaching focus that I carry.

These dynamics of imperfection, lightheartedness, humor, and support are also present related to another context where I have experienced Lori as a teacher. It concerns what seems to be one of her biggest teaching passions, which is to combine dance and movement with an imperfect process of creative writing. Through talking with Lori in different settings, I know that she sees deep interconnections between these two fields. It is true as regards how dancing/moving and writing rely upon creative permission, the courage

to dare vulnerability, imperfection, the integrity to voice expression, as well as more. In this context, I joined - which I have previously touched upon in relation to Stefan - one of Lori's online creative writing workshops during Autumn 2021. This workshop did not include dance and movement but focused on the process of creative writing alone. Nevertheless, it tapped into many of the same processes that I practice in Open Floor. It therefore also helped me encounter new embodied energy to, amongst others, keep writing this doctorate research in a time where physical dance and movement classes were still challenging to attend due to the Covid-19 regulations still in place.

When Lori and I meet, which happens on an early mid-February morning 2021 for Lori in California and an early mid-February evening for me in Norway, this writing workshop that I mention has not yet taken place. I nevertheless feel relaxed and, at the same time, curious and excited to meet Lori, as I carry such an appreciative impression of her from the Open Floor teacher-training program. Lori is in this sense continuing to feed into the impression that I have of her as a lighthearted, joyous, authentic, and down-to-earth person. She sits calm and present in the center of the screen, having allowed her short and curly dark hair to turn greyer along with her years. She wears a reddish-brown sweater, glasses in a shade of purple, and simple, silver-colored jewelry around her neck and in her ears. Furthermore, she shares her imperfect human life experiences with me in a way that often comes with a smile or laughter attached, and we additionally laugh frequently together from many other dynamics that arise. We hence end up sharing quite some lighthearted moments together throughout the approximately 100 minutes that the interview lasts.

Lori is, in difference from many of the other Open Floor teachers who I have interviewed as well as in difference from myself, not so much 'speaking' her words through her hands and moving body during our meeting. Rather, her words seem to carry a sense of calm and centered clarity that in and by itself allows meanings to unfold. It does not mean

that she is disconnected from embodied wholeness during our meeting but that the art of verbalizing her experiences - unfolded perhaps by her passion for creative writing in combination with her practice as a dancer/mover and teacher? - seems so familiar to Lori that it comes without too much effort or challenge involved. It might also be because of this that she is able to share a long flow of words that naturally enters deep and rich descriptions whenever I ask her a question, unfolding our interview encounter as the longest interview that I did. It might however also, I realize, be because Lori lives in a US American context that in general appears more comfortable with long flows of words than what I am used to within my rather 'sparsely worded' Scandinavian context.

#### **4.7.1 Movements of Integration (and Differentiation)**

To begin engaging the interview encounter with Lori, I emphasize how the key topic that stands out is the movement of *integration*. Lori explicitly uses the word 'integration' at several points and the topic also emerges related to diverse aspects that she articulates more tacitly throughout. Siegel argues in this respect how integration is "a process by which separate elements are linked together into a working whole (Siegel 2011: xiii)." Although I largely agree with this definition, I underline, based on my discussion during the research so far, how I do not consider these 'separated' elements to be truly separated on an ontological level but, in a *yin-yang* manner of paradox, see them as differentiated expressions of a whole that also are the whole undivided. In this context, Siegel affirms how integration - the process of unfolding connections in one's life - is crucial because it can prevent illness from emerging and support health to unfold (Siegel 2011: 64). However, for this integrative move to be life-affirming, it needs to involve not only the process of linking aspects together but also the process of differentiating these aspects so that the whole does not negate or devalue the equally important 'parts'. Integration, thus, gets embodied in the "balance between

differentiated [aspects] on the one hand and their linkage on the other (...) (Siegel 2011: 66).”

I have in this sense, throughout the research, built upon a transrational peace philosophy (Dietrich 2012, 2013, 2018, Echavarría Alvarez et al. 2018, Koppensteiner 2020) to content how the fabric of embodied peaces *needs* such an ongoing engagement with both integration and differentiation. As the plural form of the word ‘peaces’ implies, embodied peaces emerge many differentiated possibilities and truths on an ongoing basis, which can all be engaged in and by themselves *and* integrated into a larger dynamic whole that emerges interconnection and linkages without negating or overcoming the differentiated possibilities and truths that this whole also is (Echavarría Alvarez and Koppensteiner in Echavarría Alvarez et al. 2018: 4). As discussed in relation to the *yin-yang* principle, the two sides of this movement - differentiation and integration - are, in a paradoxical manner, simultaneously different *and* the same. Differentiation contains the potential for integration; integration emerges the potential for differentiation. Siegel confirms: “when differentiation is blocked, integration cannot occur. Without the movement toward integration, the entire system moves away from complexity - away from harmony - and into rigidity [or chaos] (Siegel 2011: 66).”

Austrian (peace) philosopher Ivan Illich states in this context how an axiom for peace research ought perhaps to be how “war [and, I add, violence and unpeace] tends to make cultures alike, whereas peace is that condition under which each culture flowers in its own incomparable way (Illich 2006: 175).” I confirm in a similar vein how the movement of integration can only be affirmative if it, paradoxically also, involves the simultaneous ‘flowering’ of unique dynamics and aspects. Without this differentiated side, the connections and wholeness that unfold cannot manifest peaces because it emerges a rigid and violent attempt to deny the dynamic multiplicity and edges of paradox that wholeness also is. When I



engage the movement integration in the following, therefore, I discuss it out of such an awareness regarding how integration also involves differentiation - as well as vice versa.

During our interview, Lori highlights how she has practiced and emerged such a paradoxical dance of integration (and differentiation) in relation to several interconnected dynamics in her life rather than in relation to one aspect alone. She hence brings attention to a multitude of interrelated movements that together co-paint a meaningful picture of embodied living. Furthermore, these integrative moves that Lori highlights help me engage a beginning integrative dance as regards the research at large. In this respect, Lori brings amongst others attention to the previously highlighted principle of correspondence, emphasizing how integration ‘within’ and integration ‘without’ dynamically co-emerge. I therefore begin my discussion in the following by engaging an ‘inner’ process of integration that Lori expresses before I move to widening circles of ‘outer’ relationality. I find that this concentric move helps me highlight a core of what embodied peaces are; a continuous practice of affirming oneself, others, and life as an ever-transforming field of embodied, interconnected, relational, paradoxical, and wholeness-oriented existence.

#### **4.7.2 Seeing and Affirming Oneself as (Already) Whole**

The first question that I ask Lori revolves, as with the other interviews that I have engaged, around “how... [she] came into... practicing Open Floor (...) and (...) maybe especially (...) what... called [her], what (...) made [her]... feel that this is something [she] had to practice?” As a response, Lori highlights a dynamic already mentioned, which concerns how she felt that she “had come home” when she first stepped onto a conscious dance and movement floor - which, as mentioned, happened through the 5Rhythms practice. She shares in this respect how this feeling of ‘coming home’ has been central for her personally, as it has kept “call[ing] [her] back” to the dance floor and make her say “when’s the next workshop? When can I do this again?” Moreover, she has witnessed it being significant as a teacher, having

had “many first-time students.... who come to... [her] classes (...) They've come up to [her] after class and said ‘whoa! I feel like... I just came home’.”

When Lori furthermore reflects upon what makes this feeling of ‘coming home’ arise for her students and herself, her contemplations engage a key aspect that has surfaced throughout the research at large. It concerns how experiencing connections with oneself as an embodied whole rather than as a partial process of a selected few dynamics is central. I have argued the importance of this holistic self-connection, as well as the potential challenges involved in unfolding it, at several different points throughout the inquiry, focusing, amongst others, upon processes of embodied self-awareness (Fogel 2009), (‘dis’)embodied dynamics of trauma (van der Kolk 2014, Levine 2010), structural violence and its lived, embodied consequences (Johnson R, 2018, Caldwell and Leighton 2018), processes of safe-enough and embodied *co*-regulation (Porges 2011, 2017, Badenoch 2017, Siegel 2011), dynamics of belonging, vulnerability, inspiration, play, radical (self)acceptance, and a spacious capacity to ‘*romme*’ (Selassie 2020, Brown 2012, 2017, Brach 2003, Hart in Hart et al. 2000, Gammage 2017), abilities to (also) language (Gendlin 1997, 2004, 2007, Williamson 2018), (‘dis’)embodied onto-epistemological frames and embodied metaphorical shifts (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999, Johnson 2007, Midgley 2001, Epstein 1995, Shepherd 2017), as well as more. The key point has been to argue how humans, from an embodied perspective, unfold, relate, create, survive, thrive, do harm, affirm life, manifest anew, as well as all the rest, in embodied ways. It is therefore necessary to familiarize oneself with the embodied reality of wholeness that oneself and others emerge if one is to affirm rather than harm and/or deny this embodied dance that oneself and others evolve. It importantly includes to deny neither ‘mind’, nor ‘body’, nor any of the other dynamics that embodied wholeness includes, but to integrate it all into a multifaceted, often paradoxical, yet always wholeness-oriented dance. Without a basic sense of this holistic self-connection, humans struggle to know what they and

others need, what they and others are, what they and others are becoming (van der Kolk 2014, Shepherd 2017). This is because the “loss of [embodied] attention to ourselves brings with it additional losses. We risk losing our emotional equanimity, our physical health, and our sense of well-being (Fogel 2009: 1).” For embodied peaces, therefore, “the practice of coming home to ourselves, many times each day (Fogel 2009: 278)” might emerge as one of the most important and meaningful practices that we can do.

Lori articulates in this respect how the feeling of ‘coming home’ that she expresses relates especially to a sense of “integrat[ing]... back into” a wholeness that she (and others) already is and has always been yet that she (and others) has ‘covered’, ‘hidden’, and ‘not expressed’ due to “a gradual process of... conditioning, wounding... trauma, cultural expectations, all making their way... into [her] body.” She underlines with this an embodied journey of healing, yet it is importantly not a healing journey that is about creating a so-called ‘new wholeness’ out of what is currently ‘separated’ and/or ‘broken, but about, to paraphrase her words, allowing the constrictions that keep her (and others) from realizing that she already is and has always been whole to ‘melt away’.

*Lori: growing up... no matter what your experience, is... a gradual process of... conditioning, wounding... trauma, cultural expectations, all making their way... into one's body. And we think we're just being ourselves, but (...) I recognize all... the parts of me... that had no expression (Lori looks straight into the camera while she shares a careful yet (self)empathic smile, pausing her words and inhaling audibly). And... you know, the things I would do and not do, the things I would say and not say. And... in this practice [conscious dance and movement]... (Lori nods her head) (...) when I really practiced it (she nods her head again)... all of those constrictions melted away (she nods her head for a third time).*

A bit later, Lori continues:

*Lori: and so... it's an integration... back... into your being that has been so conditioned that I don't have the right body, and I don't look okay, and... um... (Lori looks to side and shrugs her shoulders in a manner that says ‘I don't know’) (...) whatever the things are... that... keep us... covered or hidden or embarrassed about ourselves.*

In my understanding, Lori brings with this attention to several interesting elements. She highlights, as stated, an “integration... back... into” rather than an integration further/forward into, hence accentuating a process of “being” - which I from now on rather

refer to as wholeness - that always already *is* instead of a wholeness that is not yet here and therefore (still) needs to be created. Moreover, she underlines how she (and others) might not (always) access a lived experience of this wholeness because there are also “constrictions” “that... keep [her (and others)]... covered or hidden or embarrassed about [herself].” Next, she focuses on how these “constrictions” are *both* relationally emerged *and* (re)produced and lived through individual bodies, underscoring how the process of “growing up... no matter your experience, is... a gradual process of... conditioning, wounding... trauma, cultural expectations, all making their way... into one's body.” She brings with this attention to the deeply relational reality of embodied existence, emphasizing how she, like everyone, tends to emerge certain dynamics of herself (and others) as more or less easy or difficult to embody and engage due to past and present embeddedness within families, communities, societies, and more. Lastly, she underscores how these ‘inner-outer’ “constrictions” can always also transform through a process that, in Lori’s experience, unfolds through a ‘soft’ endeavor of ‘melting’ rather than a ‘harsher’ endeavor of, for example, ‘fighting’, ‘destroying’, or ‘forcing’ these “constrictions” away.

To in this manner explore what these elements might imply for embodied peaces, I engage a brief ontological discussion as regards what this wholeness that (already) *is* might be. Lori uses in this sense the phrasing “integration... back... into” above, yet I wonder if a slight change of words might be more meaningful. Throughout our interview, Lori brings continuous attention towards a (self)compassionate and (self)empathic process of including all what (she) *is* rather than trying to reach a ‘perfect’ state of wholeness. She thus seems to embrace a fundamentally dynamic reality that includes her pasts, presents, and futures, her shadows and lights, her healing and wounding, within an ever-present yet always transforming dance. As such, she refers in my understanding to a slightly different metaphorical idea than what moving “back... into” might imply - which also includes an

(un)conscious idea of moving somewhere else from where one currently is - highlighting a process of being and becoming that both *is* and that arises anew within each here and now.

Koppensteiner argues in this respect how humanistic perspectives on wholeness and life involve such a dynamic understanding of embodied existence. To be whole is “not a contradiction to change, but rather means the opposite (Koppensteiner 2020: 48).” It is to be and become an “integrated process of changingness (Rogers 1961: 158).” Wholeness, thus, means to practice and engage how oneself and others are and become the interconnected immediacy of each present moment rather than a so-called static, isolated, and fixed ‘self-state’. As previously engaged, Buddhist perspectives arrive at a somehow similar conclusion, yet these perspectives ultimately dissolve the notion of self to arrive at the no-self - *Anātman* - and the fundamental interdependence of life (Hanh 2017, Chödrön 2017, Kornfield 2008, Epstein 1995).

With this, the element of ‘melting’ (rather than forcing) away’ the “constrictions” that keep Lori (and others) “covered or hidden or embarrassed about [herself]” stands out as crucial. The metaphorical notion of ‘melting’ associates with an endeavor of transformation that is *not* about coercing a process of change but about allowing a new (liquid) form of the material in question to emerge through a patient enough and potent enough presence of heat. Imagine in this regard that the ‘heat’ that I mention is the emotionally warm experience of feeling authentically and unconditionally understood, seen, cared for, accepted, and even *loved* - which is what I have discussed related to Stefan before - while the material in question is our individual and collective flow of wholeness that always already *is* yet that requires this emotional heat for its liquid form to keep flowing on. Bringing this into a dynamic and perpetually changing understanding of life, I see a practice of transformation (and peaces) emerging that is *not* about judging different ‘parts’ into ‘good’ or ‘bad/evil’, ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, but about a compassionate, caring, and loving encounter with the

imperfect, challenging, beautiful, contradictory, painful, confusing, and paradoxical dance of wholeness that we already *are* and are continuously also becoming. It is however a deeply challenging endeavor of change, requiring us to compassionately and empathically welcome and engage all what *is* - including those dynamics that we might prefer not to encounter in ourselves and each other - in an emotionally warm space of love and care that can ‘melt away’ the “constrictions” that keep us from recognizing, experiencing, and affirming this intrinsic flow of wholeness that *is*.

In my following discussion, I intend in this sense to explore and engage what such a compassionate, inclusive, wholeness-oriented, and (re)connective process might look like through exploring what Lori is expressing. I nonetheless underline how it is an imperfect endeavor, moving to touch the enigmatic fabric of life as well as our ever transforming and interconnected co-existences. The process of exploration that I unfold does therefore not reach immediate answers, but gradually dances its way towards an ongoing deepening of a wholeness that cannot be fully and adequately understood before I have also, towards the end of my discussion, put the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ into a meaningful relationship with each other. I thus already anticipate a quote that I return to later: “peacemaking is the science of perceiving that things that appear apart are [also] one (Curle quoted in Woodhouse and Lederach 2016: 178).” As I poetically wrote during the online creative writing workshop that Lori facilitated and that I attended in Autumn 2021 hence (emphasized in the introduction to this subchapter):

*I am the healing.  
You are too.  
Together we dance  
in the unknown and the known.  
Emerging  
a future  
that is becoming together* (from the author’s personal notes).

I realize in this manner how one of the key aspects that Lori brings into the discussion of this research relates to how the basic onto-epistemological and metaphorical understanding that individuals, groups, conflicting parties, peace workers, students, teachers, and more apply to the starting point of an embodied dance - do we commence from wholeness or from separated pieces that need to put together (again)? - makes itself a vital difference. Beginning from wholeness allows in this respect embodied peaces to easier unfold because embodied peaces *are* whole in this paradoxical an imperfect way. I highlight in this sense one of the first things that I noted down during my Open Floor teacher-training experience. I do not remember who was teaching when this aspect came up - maybe it was Lori herself? - yet I consider it a telling example for how I was invited to approach wholeness during the teacher-training program. In my notes for the third training day, I have written

- All you need is the right view -> when you don't see yourself as separated anymore: then the rest will come by itself (from the author's personal notes)

The process of unfolding of embodied peaces undeniably involves more multifaceted processes than what this quote can show alone, yet I argue how key dynamics are already emerging 'simply' through practicing seeing oneself, others, and life as whole in this ever transforming and paradoxical way. I affirm in this sense how the philosophies and the curriculum that Open Floor leans upon do allow for such a wholeness-oriented starting point, which has also been highlighted by Gunvor, Marisu, Tamara, Imraan, Rivi, Stefan, and, now, Lori in different ways throughout the research. This aspect is therefore, I contend, already a core way I which Open Floor can potentially help unfold embodied peace possibilities.

#### **4.7.3 The Paradox(es) Involved in Healing, Transformation, and Peaces**

Building with this further upon my discussion above, I emphasize how Lori brings renewed awareness to the core paradox involved in healing, peaces, and transformation that I have previously highlighted at several points throughout the inquiry. It underlines, as engaged, how a simultaneous urge to unfold further possibilities *and* a radical acceptance of what *is*

(Brach 2003) need to be dynamically co-engaged. In the Open Floor curriculum, it is, as mentioned, amongst others approached through the value *move & include* (Open Floor International 2018: 'Our Values'), which accentuates how one can “simultaneously engage with dynamics present and potentials for further transformations (Tjersland 2019: 302).”

Lori expresses in this regard how she keeps living this central paradox both on and off the dance floor in relation to several interconnected dynamics in her life. I bring however special attention back to the aspect of ‘coming home’ already mentioned, as this aspect helps highlight a meaningful example for how healing, transformation, and peaces can be unfolded through a paradoxical both-and endeavor. Lori talks in this respect about a personal ‘reticence’ that she carries as regards engaging and expressing her full emotional range. This ‘reticence’ has not unfolded out of trauma dynamics or similar but ‘simply’ out of “the lost parts” that she has tended to ‘hide’ from herself and her surroundings because she was, as everyone, “raised by human beings... with their wounds and limitations.” Even though she “always knew [she] was loved, [she] always knew [she] was safe” - and, as Lori expresses it, this is the most important and “the rest is gravy” - her parents were, as all parents, “perfectly imperfect.” Lori therefore “carr[ies] some wounds from (...) their... beings and their wounds,” which she “subtly... embodied (...) in [her] emotional body” and out of this emerged a lived belief that “there's not a place... for (...) grief and rage and... expression.” She thus articulates how a wider engagement of these emotional dynamics has for her “been... part of... the retrieval (...) That's what's come back.”

Lori's process of ‘coming home’ and of “integrat[ing]... back into” a wholeness that (already) *is* appears with this to revolve around, first, realizing how she has unfolded some “lost parts” of herself by ‘hiding’ certain emotional dynamics from herself and her surroundings. Second, it revolves around finding embodied ways to reintegrate these “lost parts” into her expressed engagements anew. She mirrors with this the before-discussed



process of *both* noticing *and* (re)unfolding new homeostatic equilibriums (Fogel 2009: 142-144) engaged related to Rivi. 3) Third, and vitally, this process of ‘coming home’ includes, as Lori expresses it, to non-judgmentally embrace how she can still, ‘even’ after she has noticed and reintegrated her “lost parts,” emerge a tendency “to be a little (...) reticent” about these ‘parts’ because she “can’t help the way [she’s] been formed.” Crucially therefore, Lori judges neither her “lost parts” nor her tendency to remain “a little (...) reticent” about them in her way of expressing but articulates an ongoing practice of non-judgmentally embracing her “lost parts” and her ‘reticence’ within a dual endeavor of inclusion. She thus seems to embody a process of transformation that actively supports new possibilities *and* that non-judgmentally embraces what *is*.

In this context, Lori expresses how she has with time and practice learnt to view her many dynamics “in a different way” so that “they won’t rule [her]” by building an “ability... to express [her]self. (...) To just tell the truth... about how [she’s] feeling” without judging how she can still, at times, find this expression challenging. It therefore emerges similarly to how Imraan states that he, through practicing conscious dance and movement, has learnt that he does not “need to change anything about [him]self. It’s just more understanding... what’s going on. And sometimes not even understanding... but... just... noticing when something’s there. But not allowing it to (...) to drive... [his] actions.” Rivi, I believe, underlines a comparable aspect when she articulates how she has a “choice” as regards how to relate with herself and her surroundings. In this respect, I re-accentuate how crucial this capacity is when it comes to peaces, bringing attention to an interesting example that Lori at one point emphasizes related to it. It concerns how Lori and the other founders and founding members of Open Floor International also wanted to expand Open Floor in relation to the 5Rhythms practice that they came from because they, as long-term teachers and practitioners of the 5Rhythms, could “feel the places where... it [5Rhythms] didn’t go.” When I moreover ask

Lori if she “can tell a bit more about what those [places] were,” I receive, amongst others, reflections regarding the work that Gabrielle Roth (the founder of 5Rhythms) did related to ‘ego’ or ‘ego characters’ - which is how Roth (1998a: 141-172) phrased this work - as well as regards how Lori and the other founders and founding members of Open Floor International wanted to engage this so-called ‘ego’ differently in Open Floor. Importantly, everything that Lori expresses in the following is, according to Lori herself, said with “a complete bow to what Gabrielle [Roth] created. Because (...) Open Floor would not... be successful if [Roth] had not done what she did.” It is therefore *not* a devaluation of the 5Rhythms practice but a rendering of places where dynamic expansions have been engaged in Open Floor.

Roth tends in this sense to describe ‘ego’ (or ‘ego characters’) through a rather negative connotation. She often understands it as habitual ways of being and relating that limit human potentials, juxtaposing ‘ego’ with ‘soul/authentic self’. She states in this context how ‘ego’ is what “divides us [humans] against ourselves (Roth 1998a: 147)” and what “holds us back from actualizing our soul in artful living (Roth 1998a: 146).” Nevertheless, this understanding of ‘ego’ by Roth is by far the only understanding that exists, as ‘ego’ is a multifaceted term that carries different meanings and definitions. Kornfield contends: “technically, in Western psychology, ego describes a healthy organizing aspect of mind. But in common spiritual parlance, ego has a more negative connotation, as in egotistical, selfish (Kornfield 2008: 66).” ‘Ego’ can therefore also be understood more neutrally, as ‘simply’ an organizing principle that gives rise to an individual sense of identity; a personal experience of ‘I’. In Latin, ‘ego’ literally translates ‘I’ (Online Etymology Dictionary 2023). In the light of these many-faceted meanings, I would prefer to not use the term ‘ego’ at all in the following, finding that its diverse and often loaded applications can engender more confusion than clarity. Yet, seeing as Lori keeps using the term ‘ego’ below, I need to engage Roth’s understanding of it to also explore a key aspect of embodied wholeness and both-and

inclusion that Lori emphasizes connected to it. In this context, I underline how I understand the ‘ego’ that Lori, based on Roth, talks about below as processes that emerge close to what I have named ‘disembodied’ dynamics in this research; as manners of being, becoming, knowing, and relating that do *not* tend to affirm embodied wholeness.

Lori stresses in this respect how the work with ‘ego’ that she experienced in relation to Roth and the 5Rhythms practice was “brilliant” when it came to taking “the egoic characters... that we all have... and bring them into the light (...) So basically... we’re talking about self-awareness. So [we are] not acting unconsciously in the world.” Nevertheless, she also found that it could “engender self-hatred” because Roth in some ways “demonized the ego,” which “there was something.... about it that didn't (...) quite... land” with Lori. Along with the other founders and founding members of Open Floor International, therefore, Lori wanted to approach this ‘ego’ differently, seeking to radically accept and non-judgmentally embrace these many ways that humans also (rather than only) unfold ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating that do not always affirm their wholeness. In this respect, Lori and the other founders and founding members of Open Floor International sought to bring an added level of “emotional healing” into Open Floor.

*“I didn't know what the ego was until I met Gabrielle [Roth],” Lori states while looking straight at me. “And she [Roth]... worked with the ego... as an artist. (...) So to take (...) the... egoic characters... that we all have... and bring them into the light,” she nods her head while repeating her last words, “bring them into the light. And so... basically... we're talking about self-awareness. So I'm not acting unconsciously in the world.”*

After several examples for how these so-called ‘ego-characters’ might express themselves in her own and others’ life, moreover, Lori continues.

***Lori:** and so it was brilliant work [Roth’s work with ‘ego’]. I learned... so much about myself because she [Roth] gave.... a language for and an... an embodiment of it [‘ego’]. (...) It's very powerful, (...) very powerful work... in self-recognition. That it's [‘ego’] just the voices in your... head, so to speak, that it's not... ultimately who you are. Brilliant work for (...) recognizing that.*

Lori draws a deep and slow breath while putting her right hand in front of her with the thumb and her index finger pushed together as if to pinpoint the next aspect that she is about to speak. Not long before, she has hinted at how she and the other founders and founding members of Open Floor International “started to feel the limitation” of this way of working with ‘ego’. After a long pause in her words, therefore, Lori explains:

*Lori: she [Roth] framed the ego as a demon. (...) And... there was something.... about it that didn't (...) quite... land (...). Because... I think it engender self-hatred. Because we can't help the way we have been formed. That's why I said before (...) I'm always going to be a little (...) reticent, you know... to... express my emotions... the minute they come up. Or tell the truth about how I'm really feeling. (...) But (...) the healing... is not in trying to slay that part of myself. The healing is in... putting my arms around her [that 'part']... and saying 'I know, this is hard... but don't worry, I got it covered, we'll be okay'(...). It's about self-love. And to hate any part of yourself is counterproductive (Lori inhales). And so we [the founders and founding members of Open Floor International] wanted to... bring that level of (...) emotional healing... to... our [Open Floor] practice.*

I can with this recognize how Lori's expression resonates with how I have myself gradually learnt to approach my many facets and dynamics differently through a process of healing and of (re)affirming my wholeness that I have, amongst others, emerged through practicing Open Floor. I remember in this sense how I would previously - although I can still emerge tendencies of it - often judge myself harshly whenever I sensed that I was relating to myself and my surroundings in so-called 'unhelpful' manners - judging myself both for my ways of relating and for judging myself for it. What I have learnt, however, is that this two-fold process of (self)judgement only leads to more suffering and judgement, as I become trapped in an either-or way of relating that tries to be only 'whole' and 'good' and not also the imperfect 'partial' that this wholeness also is. Similarly to Lori, I have thus realized how the healing (and, I add, the transformation) does not lie "in trying to slay" these 'parts' of myself but in "putting [my] arms around [them]... and saying 'I know, this is hard... but don't worry, I got it covered, we'll be okay'." In other words, "it's about self-love" rather than self-separation. This has vitally become one of my most important peace practices, as I have experienced how this unconditional (self)acceptance *is* the base out of which I can keep unfolding life-affirming ways to be, become, know, and relate - both in relation to myself and in relation to my human and more-than-human surroundings.

US American author and teacher trained in the Karma Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, Tsultrim Allione (2008), contends in this regard how, instead of always trying to 'fight' and 'get rid of' our so-called, 'difficult', 'painful', or 'unwanted' aspects, we can give

them compassionate, loving attention as well as deep, authentic listening as means to nourish the genuine needs that lie at their base. Allione calls it to ‘feed (rather than fight) our demons’, basing her approach upon the teachings of eleventh-century Buddhist teacher Machig Labdrön. Allione has however adapted these teachings to a current ‘Western’ context and accentuates how “our demons are not ancient gargoyles from eleventh-century Tibet. They are our present preoccupations, the issues in our lives blocking our experience of freedom (Allione 2008: 43).” In this context, Allione asserts how the “habit of fighting against our perceived problems gives demons strength rather than weakening them (Allione 2008: 44)” because “all demons are rooted in our tendency to create polarization (Allione 2008: 44).” By allowing these separating (self)judgmental tendencies to ‘simply melt away’, therefore - applying a process of love and understanding - we can “free ourselves from [our] demons by eliminating their very source (Allione 2008: 44).” This is because the emotionally ‘warm’ experience of compassion, empathy, and love can help release the dynamic life energy that has been locked up in what is ultimately an ongoing ‘struggle’ against ourselves.

There is in this sense one key dimension of Open Floor that has for me been vital in terms of emerging such a (self)compassionate, non-judgmental, and loving process of understanding and transformation. It concerns how Open Floor is a *dance and movement* practice and how it therefore, at its core, works with embodied wholes *as they move* (Tjersland 2019). It implies, as engaged, how ongoing transformation can be tapped into as the foundation for life, embracing how embodied wholes always emerge through an ongoing process of change. According to LaMothe: “if movement is what matters, then we humans are essentially movement too. And if humans are movement, then we are - in every dimension of our bodily selves - a constant process of bodily becoming (LaMothe 2015: 15).” As regards the healing and wholeness-affirming process that I have emphasized, this core recognition of movement has in this regard helped me realize how whatever I might be

manifesting in a current moment this *is* will always also change as the dance keeps dancing on. It is therefore much easier to embrace the so-called ‘unhelpful parts’ because I know how these ‘parts’ will become differently anew. It is hence more possible to dance with what might be uncomfortable, painful, shameful, and scary - along with what might be pleasurable, joyful, inspiring, and peaceful - because I trust how this dance is not a deterministic essence of what I am and how my life will be but some of the many dynamics that I live within an ever-transforming web.

I have in this respect, throughout the inquiry, accentuated how embodied peaces *are* about such an ever-ongoing engagement of our many dynamic (dis)equilibriums (Dietrich 2012: 210-269, Ditzel Facci 2020, Tjersland 2019). They therefore unfold as a constant endeavor of dynamism rather than as an attempt to deny or avoid this vibrant life flow. Nevertheless, when I tap into the rigid processes of (self)judgment highlighted, I often stop myself from embracing this dance as I halter my movement within a limiting either-or. Yet, through practicing (self)love, (self)compassion, (self)acceptance, and (self)empathy, I can dynamically keep on unfolding as I let go of trying to change what I am and what I have been. I can with this easier unfold into a larger, wholeness-oriented space where perceived dualities fade to make room for a wider, all-encompassing dance. In the words of Rogers: “the curious paradox is that when I accept myself as I am, then I change (Rogers 1961: 17).” Lori emphasizes a similar dynamic when she at one point expresses how an embodied capacity for unconditional “awareness” - cultivated, amongst others, through an embodied and movement-oriented focus in Open Floor - has helped her become more present with what *is* while realizing how this *is* is just one possibility amongst many others. This *is* therefore, can (and will) also change. I am apparently deeply resonating with what she expresses, as I am audibly confirming her words with affirmatory sounds while she is speaking.

*Lori: Open Floor has... shortened the time between... experience and awareness... of the experience. (...) And often awareness... moves it... much more quickly.*

“Ehem, ehem!” I eagerly (and rather unconsciously) confirm Lori’s words from my side of the screen. I have undeniably experienced how a mindful awareness of what *is* can, in and by itself, constitute an embodied process of transformation.

*Lori: so... I would say in terms of my own... “stuff” (Lori makes herself the sign for quotation marks with her fingers) so to speak, it's like... ‘oh, I know that part of me. And... it's just activated. And it's not... the ultimate truth about anything. It's just what's happening right now’ (Lori draws her breath). And (...) I know that if I... work it physically (...) it will move... It will move.*

Open Floor seems in this sense - similarly to what I have highlighted related to the other interviews that I have engaged - to have helped both Lori and myself emerge more of what we are and more of what we can also become. It has, amongst others, happened through the added layer of “emotional healing,” as this added layer has supported us to manifest a dynamic and wholeness-oriented way of relating that can approach our many facets with empathy, love, compassion, and non-judgment rather than a separating either-or. For me, the movement-oriented dimension of Open Floor has in this context been crucial, helping me emerge such a paradoxical both-and dance that can accept what *is* and manifest new possibilities. I therefore realize how one of the core ways that Open Floor can help unfold embodied peace potentials is through supporting myself and others to continuously integrate and differentiate, rather than separate and violate, the paradoxical processes involved in our wholeness this way. This is also, I contend, one of the core ways that Open Floor can help unfold embodied peaces as a *soul and spirit-based discipline*.

#### **4.7.4 Cultivating a Soulful and (In)Spirited Art of Presence**

According to Lederach, the complex landscapes of peaces and conflicts require that we also “go to the core, that we make our way to the voices behind the noise, that we see the patterns hidden beneath the presenting symptoms, that we feel the rhythms marking steady pace in spite of the cacophony (Lederach 2005: 103).” It necessitates in other words a wholeness-oriented capacity to see not only the multifaceted complexity that arise but also the underlying patterns of simplicity that dance at complexity’s base (Lederach 2005: 33). It

hence calls for an aesthetic process of intuition that can hold “complexity and simplicity together (Lederach 2005: 71),” emerging in line with the soulful and (in)spirited art and practice of ‘inner-outer’ balance discussed related to Rivi and the ‘artistic-like expressions of resiliency’ (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 227) engaged related to Imraan. It might furthermore, I propose, emerge in line with the non-judgmental capacity to ‘*romme*’ and the spacious ability to breathe through multiple dynamics that arise, which I have, in connection with Stefan, engaged amongst others in relation to my personal process of grief and of losing my father. It is with this a wider capacity for wholeness that can support embodied wholes to embrace and engage their imperfect life dance. This is a dance where, as Chödrön expresses it, things “come together and (...) fall apart. Then they come together again and fall apart again (Chödrön 1997: 14).” Healing, transformation, and peaces, therefore, arise by “letting there be room for all of this to happen: room for grief, for relief, for misery, or joy (Chödrön 1997: 14).” It does not mean to be indifferent to suffering but to affirmatively engage the many-faceted expressions of life as one continuously unfolds a paradoxical life dance.

I have in this respect, in relation to Rivi, previously discussed how such a soulful and (in)spirited art and practice of wholeness can easier emerge if individuals and collectives move within a balanced and resourced enough web. This is because processes of spirit and soul tend to arise out of an ‘inner-outer’ sense of balance where, as highlighted, “the personal self is aligned and in touch with the larger whole (Koppensteiner 2020: 184).” It can therefore be difficult to manifest this wider sense of wholeness if individuals and collectives live in a constant fabric of trauma, (only) survival, and (too much) stress (Porges 2011, 2017, Fogel 2009), as one can easily end up feeling overwhelmed and move outside one’s windows of tolerance/presence (Siegel 2011, Open Floor International 2017: 133). One might with this struggle to “recruit the wonderful neural circuits that enable us to express the expansive, creative, and benevolent aspects of being human (Porges 2017: 86),” being in a constant state



of alert where one engages (mainly) the more ‘narrowly’-oriented survival system rather than (also) the more ‘openly’-oriented social engagement system (Porges 2011, 2017).

Lori does in this context, rather subtly and at two different points during the interview, bring attention to how Open Floor has helped and keeps helping her unfold such a dynamic sense of balance that helps her stay soulfully and (in)spiritedly present within her windows of tolerance/presence. It happens, amongst others, because Open Floor helps her bring her many dynamics together “in the same moment and the same place,” which in turn, Lori articulates, unfolds a “soulful and spiritual embodiment.” Lori emphasizes in this regard how “you don't have to do anything to get there [into this balance] (...) it's not hard work” “because of the way we (...) teach... the (...) practice [Open Floor] with... the simple principles that anybody can do” “it's like the practice... does its work [for you]... if you do it.” ‘Simply’ because Open Floor is a practice that facilitates ongoing explorations into a wholeness-oriented web, therefore, she does, as a dancer and mover, not need to do anything more than to ‘simply’ practice it. This ‘simple’ practice requires however, I affirm, a continuous commitment to keep dancing the manifold experiences that one encounters.

The “simple principles” that Lori refers to above relate in this context, amongst others, to what in Open Floor are called *core movement resources* (see chapter 3.4.1) - with Lori herself explicitly mentioning three different core movement resources at this point during the interview. They are, as engaged, innate ways in which human bodies can move and are thus “naturally accessible, resourcing, and healing (...) (Open Floor International 2017: 23).” They are with this tapped into as elicitive (Lederach 1995, Dietrich 2013) and embodied tools that dancers and movers can engage both on and off the dance floor to support themselves and each other to access a lived sense of balance. This lived sense of balance can in turn help them “explore and communicate [their] experience of life in these human bodies (...) resource [them]selves both on and off the dance floor (...) build capacities

as dancers and as human beings (...) widen [their] window of presence (Open Floor International 2017: 23).” I have in this context previously discussed how Rivi, before she encountered conscious dance and movement, did not have such “a tool... (...) when [she is] (...) overstretched and stressed out. [She] didn't have a tool... to say ‘now I'm going to do [something to restore a sense of balance].” Similarly, Tamara expresses how she, through practicing Open Floor, has found the “tools to notice when [she is] not [in balance] (...) and (...) do something... nourishing.”

It seems in a comparable way that conscious dance and movement (including 5Rhythms and Open Floor) has become such an ongoing (spiritual) practice and embodied, resource-based tool for Lori. It is particularly visible related to one element that she at one point expresses connected to what I have earlier, in relation to Rivi, named one of the potentially most ‘scary’ realities of being alive. It concerns how humans, as embodied wholes, are not only engaged in a process of living but always also in a process of dying. Lori highlights in this regard how she now, as a 66-year-old woman, needs to find “grace” with her process of aging and embrace how her “body is really changing.” A practice of radically accepting this process has in this sense unfolded a life-affirming capacity for “presence” that has dropped Lori right “into the essence of why would we practice [Open Floor] at all. Which is... in this moment... is there anything wrong? No!” Open Floor hence helps her stay present with “all those things [that] are going on... the calamities, the country, you know, personal, (...) the world” *and*, at the same time, embody a “but right now (...) all is well.” Out of this, she realizes how “if you... line yourself up... body... mind... emotion... and spirit, in one place (...) there's nothing but this moment. And this moment... is yours.”

*“My body is really changing,” Lori nods her head while speaking. “And the... strength and the vigor that I used to bring to the dance floor,” she shakes her head, “I just don't have it. I'm older, you know. And... (...) I'm... making grace with that...,” she pauses her words for quite some time before she repeats her last sentence with one important change of words. “I am finding grace with that. And (...) I don't... think I could do it... if I didn't have... (...) a practice that really, really works on... the bigger picture, the deeper picture... and self-acceptance... of how you are.”*

Lori changes her voice to a higher and more enthusiastic pitch, smiling, shrugging her shoulders, and shaking her head lightly. “*This is just true! This is just what’s happening!*” she eagerly exclaims before continuing:

*Lori: and (...) I think it [Open Floor] has given me... (Lori pauses her words while she looks up and to the side as if to ‘search for’ for the next words to speak)... Open Floor... (she keeps ‘searching’ for the next words to speak) really gets me present (she nods her head as if to confirm that ‘present’ was the word that she was looking for). It really brings me present. And in that presence... it’s been very helpful actually... in the last year because there’s been a lot of... personal calamity in my life... on top of Covid[-19]<sup>143</sup>. (...) Um... some really, really big and tough things that... I think twenty, ten, twenty years ago could have taken me down.*

She pauses her words calmly.

*Lori: and (...) I recognize the fruits of my practice now. Which is... right now... all those things are going on... the calamities, the country, you know, personal, (...) the world. Um... but right now... I’m having a cup of coffee and looking at someone who I love [referring to me, Hanne, who is sitting (virtually) in front of her] and we’re having a really interesting conversation (Lori draws her breath). And... all is well in this moment. So... that has (...) dropped me into the essence of why would we practice [Open Floor] at all. Which is... in this moment... is there anything wrong? No! And do I actually... know what’s gonna happen in the next moment? No! So... here I am. Here I am. And this is sweet. (...) It all gets very precious.*

After sharing an inspirational story from a book that she has read, Lori proceeds:

*Lori: I understand it much better now, that (...) with all that... we go through in our lives... we start to recognize the arc that we’re on, or the arc that I’m on... like everybody else ... and (Lori raises her voice to a higher and more insistent pitch) I don’t have time... to not be in the present! I don’t have time! I can’t! I don’t want to miss this [life]! I don’t want to miss anything! (she lowers and calms the pitch of her voice again). And so... I do believe that... Open Floor practice is... one way that I keep cementing... presence. Being... present... here and now. Because you can’t dance yesterday! You can’t dance tomorrow. You can only... dance... right this moment. And if you... line yourself up... body... mind... emotion... and spirit, in one place (...) there’s nothing but this moment, and this moment... is yours.*

Lori pauses her words.

“*It’s quite a teaching,*” she calmly affirms.

What Lori underlines concerns with this a crucial recognition regarding how can dance with dynamics of joy, peace, love, and more *together and along* with the challenges, pains, and complexities that one encounters. One can in other words be present with “all those things [that] are going on... the calamities, the country, you know, personal, (...) the world” and embody a “all is well in this moment.” The “presence” that Lori speaks about

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<sup>143</sup> This interview happened around the 1-year mark of the global Covid-19 outbreak (in February 2021).

hence manifests as a co-existing both-and, emerging as an (in)spired dance of living that, as engaged, does not take us away from embodied life but “brings us most fully into the heart of it, beg for our full presence, and transforms it before our eyes (Hart in Hart et al. 2000: 50).” It is therefore an art and practice of peaces that affirms how peaces and conflicts, pains and joys, suffering and inspiration, can dance through and with each other, unfolding, in a *yin-yang* manner of paradox, a process of aliveness out of an encounter with mortality, a dance of joy out of an experience of aging, an art of presence out of knowing how everything changes and will at one point also cease to be what it currently is.

I want in this context to end my discussion of this section by highlighting what Open Floor International used to write on an earlier version of their homepage related to what they understand with ‘being embodied’:

when we use the dance to be fully embodied - physically, emotionally, mindfully - it simply means being home for the beautiful ride of being alive. It means we’re present for anything and everything: loving, losing, colliding, learning, creating, connecting, feeling.

To be embodied is to come to our senses. To show up and learn to stay with our experience whether it’s good or bad. To feel our power and to make things happen in our world.

When we live an embodied life we are fluid, flexible, and free to experience all of the wild and subtle moments that go by, the ones that are heavenly and the ones that drop us to our knees.

To be embodied is to arrive at death in peace, free of regret for having missed our life because we weren’t home<sup>144</sup>.

A key dimension involved in how Open Floor can help unfold embodied peaces revolves in this sense around it can possibly help both myself and others show up for the fullness of our lives in this manner. It can with this, as Lori has expressed it before, help us be “home” for the embodied dance that we are living. This aspect has notably been touched upon by all the Open Floor teachers who I have interviewed, as each of them have, in their different ways, emphasized how Open Floor has helped them embody more of what they are

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<sup>144</sup> This earlier, slightly shortened version of a text originally written on the Open Floor International homepage is now quoted from my professional homepage (Peace in Movement 2022: ‘What is Open Floor?’).

and more of what they can also become. A crucial aspect behind this capacity for presence concerns in this regard, I propose, how Open Floor can help dancers and movers cultivate a lived sense of ‘inner-outer’ balance through, amongst others, supporting them to engage an embodied field of recourses that they already *are* as well as are continuously becoming. In this context, Lori states how this wider capacity for presence and balance is ultimately an essence involved in “why would we practice [Open Floor] at all.” I add how it is also an essence involved in why would we live and why would we continue living this imperfect life at all even when it can, at times, hurt and bring us conflicts, tensions, pain, suffering, and ‘disembodied’ tendencies - along, of course, with joy, inspiration, peaces, love, play, and, to paraphrase Lori, ‘cups of coffee while looking at someone we love’. It is thus an affirmative practice and art that denies neither the pleasurable nor the painful realities of life but continuously moves what *is* into an ongoing participation in an ever-transforming life flow. A practice and art of peaces hence arises that emerges in line with what Chödrön calls a spiritual ‘peace art’. It implies to, “instead of spending hours and hours disciplining ourselves to defeat the enemy, we (...) spend hours and hours dissolving the causes of war (Chödrön 2017: 127).” In the previous words of Lori: we spend hours and hours ‘melting away’ those constrictions that keep us - as individuals and collectives - “covered or hidden or embarrassed about ourselves.” Embodied peaces might therefore unfold as the continuous manifestations of that life-affirming energy that keeps us dancing and unfolding. If, as Lori articulates it, practicing Open Floor can help us cultivate this energy, then I agree; it *is* “quite a teaching.”

#### **4.7.5 ‘Inner’ and ‘Outer’**

At this point, I move to discuss how the soulful and (in)spirited capacity for a larger, more inclusive, and more wholeness-oriented way of being, becoming, knowing, and relating ‘within’ that I have discussed above also intertwine with the possibilities for being, becoming, knowing, and relating ‘without’. I have in other words arrived at the second main

movement of integration (and differentiation) that I discuss in this subchapter, which concern ‘outer’ dynamics of relationality. As engaged, however, I lean upon the before mentioned principle of correspondence to highlight how the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ dynamically co-unfold. I thus tap into a transrational understanding of peaces, emphasizing how “every change of external affairs and relations has an impact on the internal condition of the people involved - and vice versa (Dietrich 2014: 55).” Curle contends:

the public and the private, the inner and the outer, the large and the small are merely different facets of the same whole, the same truth. If we consider them as being opposite or irreconcilable principles we won’t see that truth. If we concentrate on one to the exclusion of the other the right things will not happen. (...) If I simply work on myself and ignore the other how shall I know myself since the other is part of myself, from whom my separation is illusionary? If I simply work on the other, ignoring myself, I shall not know [them] either since I can only see [them] clearly through eyes lightened by self-knowledge. Peacemaking is the science of perceiving that things that appear to be apart are [also] one (Curle quoted in Woodhouse and Lederach 2016: 177-178).”

Hanh (2017) emphasizes in this respect how one of the core teachings of Buddhism - ‘form is emptiness and emptiness is form’, which can be found in the *Prajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya Sūtra* (Heart Sutra) - underlines how all phenomena, including human experience, are ultimately empty of an independent existence. It implies, as engaged, how embodied life does not include an ontologically separate self but continuously co-unfolds as processes of interdependence with everything and everyone else. It does not mean that personal experience is not ‘real’ but that this experience is, in the final instance, a perpetual process of *interbeing* (Hanh 2017: 27-29. Emphasis in original). Emptiness, therefore, “means only the *emptiness* of self, not the *nonbeing* of self (Hanh 2017: 20. Emphasis in original),” as “empty of a separate self means full of everything (Hanh 2017: 33).” Said differently, to be alive means to be full of the entire universe precisely because one is empty of a separate self. In this regard, Hanh uses a sheet of paper to help illustrate this existential entanglement of life:

if you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there can be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, we cannot make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. If

the cloud is not here, the sheet of paper cannot be here either. So we can say that the cloud and the paper *inter-are*.

(...) Looking even more deeply, we can see we are also in the paper. This is not difficult to see, because when we look at a sheet of paper, the sheet of paper becomes the object of our perception. (...) Everything - time, space, the earth, the rain, the minerals in the soil, the sunshine, the cloud, the river, the heat, and even consciousness - is in that sheet of paper. Everything coexists with it. To be is to inter-be. You cannot just *be* by yourself alone; you have to inter-be with every other thing. This sheet of paper is, because everything else is (Hanh 2017: 27-28. Emphasis in original).

As touched upon, this understanding of embodied life as an ongoing process of interconnection arises important consequences for peaces. It manifests peaces as a process that is neither about affirming and engaging a so-called ‘separate’ wholeness ‘out there’ nor about affirming and engaging a so-called ‘static essence within’. Rather, it is about affirming and engaging a dynamic dance of co-being, co-becoming, co-knowing, and co-relating. To manifest peaces, therefore, is to engage a dynamic web of co-existence that keeps emerging differently anew depending on how diverse individuals and collectives are, do, know, relate, and become within different contexts and situations. It hence involves a fabric that is simultaneously individual and collective, accentuating how peaces (and conflicts) are as much ‘inner’ as they are ‘outer’, as much personal as they are shared. One can therefore, as stated, approach peaces (and conflicts) from two and even simultaneous sides, beginning “in and with personal as well as relational layers (Dietrich 2014: 55).” This notably makes a key task for peace workers: to “bear the principle of correspondence in mind and apply it when providing the framework for the transformative work and when eventually giving impulses (Dietrich 2014: 55).” It thus becomes a “tremendous and wonderful challenge that takes us into the deep layers of ourselves, so we can be of service to the world outside ourselves (Dietrich 2014: 228).” I add, based upon the understanding of interbeing engaged, how peace work also becomes the tremendous and wonderful challenge that takes into the deep layers of our surroundings so that we can also be of service to ourselves.

I have in this respect, throughout the research, emphasized several different ways in which Open Floor can help acknowledge, affirm, and engage how peaces are equally ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ in this manner. It is for example visible in the Open Floor curriculum related to how ‘inner-outer’ relationality is recognized as a foundation for embodied existence (see especially chapter 3.3.2). Furthermore, it has been highlighted in diverse ways by the Open Floor teachers who I have interviewed. For example, I have together with Gunvor explored embodied sensations of true belonging (Brown 2017) and life-affirming dynamics of community that require *both* the individually unique *and* the collectively shared. In connection to Imraan, I have investigated a relational ‘path of healing’ that has not only unfolded out of Imraan’s individual engagements but also out of safe-enough and welcoming-enough spaces of embodied *co*-regulation (Badenoch 2017). Marisu has in turn explained how she was welcome to be in “a broken moment” and in a “vulnerable place” during the Open Floor teacher-training program, which helped her unfold an ‘inner’ process of healing self-acceptance (Brach 2003) *and* an ‘outer’ process of sharing these healing potentials with others through, amongst others, teaching Open Floor. This interpenetrating reality between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ is however perhaps the most succinctly put by Tamara, who explicitly states that Open Floor has helped her unfold ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating that do not force her to “choose between (...) being... authentic and being with people.”

In addition, Lori highlights, at especially two points during the interview, how Open Floor has helped her unfold such a corresponding reality between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’. She underlines how her before-discussed ‘inner’ capacities to soulfully and (in)spiritedly affirm herself *as* (already) whole have also emerged ‘without’. She has - through her “years of being on dance floors, as a student and (...) a teacher - found ways to approach others in a similar vein. She has therefore found ways to emerge “more compassion” for others and to let her



“judgements melt more quickly.” This has made it easier for her to see the “soul”, “essence,” and “heart” - wholeness - of others “a little more quickly.”

**Lori:** *I've also.... in the years of being on dance floors, as a student and... the years of being a teacher... I see people... (...) it's easier for me to see... the essence and heart of them.*

Lori pauses her words while she leans her upper body forward and towards the screen.

*“Even when they annoy me!” she (self)empathically exclaims while laughing heartedly with herself. “And it doesn't mean I don't get annoyed...,” she keeps sharing her laughter with me, “but... I have more compassion. I have more compassion. It doesn't mean that I'm... you know... deep, heartfelt friends with everyone (...). But my judgments... my judgments melt more quickly now. They come up... because that's how I've been conditioned... and then... I just... see the soul [of others]... a little more quickly.”*

A bit later, Lori adds:

**Lori:** *I think I have... a certain patience and love and compassion... no matter what's going on (...). Because... first I take [what another person might do] personally. And (...) that's like a personal... insult to me. And then... I very quickly go: ‘if [the other] is acting this way... what's going on inside of [them]?’ (Lori nods her head). And so yes, I think it [practicing an ‘inner’ process of (self)affirmation and wholeness through Open Floor/conscious dance and movement] has... affected... how I am in a relationship. Because, you know, I could hang on to that [what another person might do]... for a really long time... 30 years ago (...). It's back to that [we, humans] weren't born that way. And if someone's acting... badly, there's something going on. Because I don't think essentially... we want to hurt the people we love. (...) So... yeah (...) I think I'm repeating the same thing many... different ways. But that the same... [reactive] instincts and impulses and emotional reactions come up... and I pretty quickly move into... compassion.... (...) I might still be mad... but the compassion is there. And I more want to... understand what's going on with somebody. And I want them to understand what's going on inside of me. It's not all one way, of course.*

Lori brings with this vital attention to an interconnected ‘inner-outer’ reality. She highlights how her ‘outer’ capacities to “see the soul” (wholeness) of others “a little more quickly” and to manifest “a certain patience and love and compassion... no matter what's going on” - even if, as Lori articulates, others might “annoy [her]” and she might not be “deep, heartfelt friends with everyone” - cannot be seen apart from her before-engaged ‘inner’ capacities to affirm herself. Her ongoing endeavor of tuning into wholeness and compassion ‘without’ therefore interdepends with her corresponding capacities ‘within’ - as well as vice versa. In this respect, I recognize another core way that Open Floor can help unfold embodied peace potentials. It relates to how Open Floor can help individuals and collectives continuously engage and affirm their interpenetrating ‘inner-outer’ reality in this way. At the

same time, I recognize how Open Floor might still need to explore this ‘inner-outer’ web of correspondence further, as there are, as underlined, still relational dynamics that Open Floor has not yet found ways to transformatively enough engage. In the following, I explore this vital web of further ‘inner-outer’ transformation in more depth by engaging the not-yet-fully-emerged endeavor that Lori, in her sharing below, refers to as “embodied social justice.”

#### **4.7.6 The Not-Yet-Fully-Emerged Endeavor of Embodied Social Justice**

At one point, Lori emphasizes, in relation to the ongoing transformation and development of Open Floor, how we in Open Floor have now arrived at a place where “right now, what we’re... grappling with... and challenged by is... embodied social justice... embodied antiracism work. Because most of us are white.” She thus stresses a lack of wider diversity and inclusion that I have touched upon at several points throughout the inquiry. It relates how Open Floor has in some ways (un)consciously remained a

white, Western, educated, able-bodied, neuronormative and upper middle-class arena, failing to sufficiently integrate the lived realities of people of color, indigenous people, differently abled and/or neurodiverse people, people of different socioeconomic classes and people from the Global South (Tjersland and Borovica 2021: 2).

I approach in this sense the endeavor of “embodied social justice” that Lori highlights as a process that encompasses more than *only* “embodied antiracism work” to *also* involve a larger web of inclusion/exclusion that includes dynamics related to, amongst others, gender, sexuality, neuroidentity, ability, and class. Nonetheless, I recognize the specific focus on “embodied antiracism work” that Lori carries, which, at the one hand, cannot be seen apart from the US American context in which she teaches and lives, and, on the other hand, is highly relevant to engage in other sociocultural contexts, including my Norwegian/European setting<sup>145</sup>. I therefore approach the endeavor of “embodied social justice” that Lori expresses

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<sup>145</sup> See for example Menakeem 2021 and Wise 2011 for interesting reflections on and experiences of race and (anti)racism in the US - written from a Black and white perspective respectively - while Gullestad 2002 and Døving 2020 provide valuable discussions (in Norwegian) about racism in Norway specifically.

as an intertwined endeavor of change that centers around daring to explore, acknowledge, and engage how diverse social inclusions and exclusions are felt, (re)produced, resisted, and transformed in embodied manners. “Embodied social justice,” hence, implies working to change “the relational fabric of our lives so that structural shifts correspond with authentic transformations in attitude, and where legal rights and freedoms are experienced at the core of our beings and manifested in our everyday interactions with others (Johnson, R 2018: 2)” It is therefore an endeavor that, in my understanding, deeply intertwines with decolonial, feminist, intersectional, environmental, and more, efforts.

I have in this context previously discussed how Open Floor has *started* (rather than completed) to engage such a critical process of transformation by trying to unfold more authentic possibilities for diversity and inclusion in the organization and practice. As highlighted, however, the road is still long to travel. I have therefore, amongst others, argued for a two-fold venture of (self)reflexivity where we as individual Open Floor teachers *and* as a collective Open Floor can reflect upon and engage our lived positionings, sociocultural blind spots, and embodied implications - as well as the unique potentials and resources that this positionality emerges (see Rothberg 2019, Kester and Cremin 2017, Tjersland and Borovica 2021, Chang in Chaiklin and Wengrower 2009). In relation to Tamara, I have moreover touched upon how this process needs to be *embodied* rather than ‘disembodied’, helping us in Open Floor tap into the same embodied wisdom that we teach. It is especially in this latter context that the prominent focus on “embodied social justice” that Lori carries - with a noticeable emphasis on the word ‘embodied’ in her sharing - becomes so essential.

Lori highlights in this regard how she, when it comes to “embodied social justice,” “stick[s] by the thing [they, the founders and founding members of Open Floor International]... slapped on the cover of the [Open Floor teacher-training] manual, which

is... ‘all knowledge until it’s in the body is still a rumor’<sup>146</sup>.” She thus underlines how “everything needs to be embodied,” as without this embodied engagement “you don’t have it (...) it’s not yours yet.” She manages with this to bring crucial attention to an aspect that I have touched upon at several points, which concern how all authentic processes of transformation need to, as Lori phrases it below, involve more than only “intellectual... promises and decisions” to also include a felt, embodied living that can genuinely engage rather bypass the many challenging dynamics involved (see Tjersland and Borovica 2021, Ahmed 2012, Berila 2016, Caldwell and Leighton 2018). Lori expresses:

*Lori: I stick by the thing we [the founders and founding members of Open Floor International]... slapped on the cover of the [teacher-training] manual, which is...*

Lori slaps one of her hands onto the table in front of her. I cannot see the movement from my side of the screen, yet the sound is noticeable, catching my attention. Lori continues:

*Lori: ‘all knowledge until it’s in the body is still a rumor’. And so... (...) it’s very easy to... make intellectual... promises and decisions about changing one’s behavior and attitudes... (Lori inhales, shakes her head, and starts to smile in a slight yet (self)empathic manner. Her voice is soft). But if you’re not feeling it in your body (...) (she continues to shake her head while smiling softly) you don’t have it yet (she keeps shaking her head). It’s not yours yet.*

In relation to a US American racialized context, Menakem (2021) argues how such an embodied approach to social transformation is crucial. He contends how a key to transforming deep-rooted dynamics of structural racism is to begin with the healing of bodies, including white and Black<sup>147</sup> bodies alike. This is because entrenched dynamics of what Menakem calls *white-body* supremacy - thus accentuating its embodied component - cannot be transformed in purely cognitive manner but requires an approach that also takes the lived reality of sensate-emotional bodies, including our nervous systems, seriously. Our sensate-emotional bodies carry in this sense “a form of knowledge that is different from our cognitive brains [alone]. (...) The body is where we fear, hope, and react; where we constrict and release; and where we reflexively fight, flee, or freeze (Menakem 2021: 5).” Menakem

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<sup>146</sup> These are the exact words that are quoted on the front cover of the teacher-training manual that was used in my Open Floor teacher-training program. They are quoted as ‘anonymous’ on the teacher-training manual.

<sup>147</sup> Although Menakem often also includes Native American bodies as well as, in his words, ‘other dark’ bodies in his writings, he tends in to write mainly about and from a Black African American experience specifically.

links this to, amongst others, the before-discussed polyvagal theory (Porges 2011, 2017), underlining how a deep, visceral needs to feel safe-enough often move as a driving force behind multiple ways that individuals and collectives (un)consciously live, resist, express, and transform diverse patterns of racialized (and other forms of) discrimination.

US American professor of women's studies and embodied leadership facilitator and coach, Beth Berila, similarly posits how much anti-oppressive education would benefit from including an embodied approach in addition to its critical engagement. This is because “whether we are a member of a marginalized group, a member of a dominant group, or (more likely) both, the ideologies and power dynamics that uphold systems of oppression are embedded in our very being (Berila 2016: 34).” Intentionally involving a process of embodied (self)awareness (Fogel 2009) - which Berila mainly refers to as mindfulness in her writings - can thus help us understand and make visible dynamics of racialized and other forms of oppression *as well as* actively help resist and transform these dynamics as we become familiar with how they show up in our individual and collective manners of being, becoming, knowing, and relating (see also Caldwell and Leighton 2018, Tuchlok 2010, Johnson, R 2018). It can with this, as touched upon, help us reclaim “the felt experience of [our] bod[ies] [as] a political act (...) (Johnson, R 2018: 131)”

What the “embodied” approach to social justice that Lori articulates can help manifest is in this respect a qualitatively different approach to transformation that grounds the endeavor in a lived engagement with the embodied complexity that both oneself and others evolve rather than a (over)intellectualized and often one-dimensional idea about what ‘should and should not be’. It can with this help us co-emerge an honest and vulnerable exploration of our individual and shared realities, which, I argue, is crucial because transformation - the felt shift and change that “influences all parts of the self (Koppensteiner 2020: 49)” - *is* such a multifaceted, non-linear, and dynamically lived ‘inner-outer’ dance. As white antiracist

educator and professor Shelly Tochluk argues - also in a US American context - “part of approaching race work [and, I add, other authentic endeavors of change] (...) involves healing from our cultural splits wherein our history has encouraged us to value the head, mind, and rational over the heart, body, and emotional (Tochluk 2010: 252).” It is in other words a process of transformation that manifests not out of (further) disconnection and separation but out of an embodied experience of the before engaged *(re)connection*. It can with this, potentially, help us co-evolve a possibility for the before-discussed ‘epistemic disobedience’ (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, Mignolo 2009), unfolding a process of knowing that actively resists and transforms the ‘disembodied’, Cartesian-inspired - and, dare I say(?), ‘Western and white’ - onto-epistemological tendency to create linear and static categories that constantly put ‘me’ and ‘you’, ‘mind’ and ‘body’, ‘personal’ and ‘collective’, and more, into incompatible either-ors and disconnecting ‘us vs. them’. Nonetheless, to emerge such a *(re)connective* process one needs, I affirm, to engage the sensate-emotional together and along with the cognitive because, as Berila puts it, “as much as I advocate integrating mindfulness into anti-oppression efforts, I also advocate bring[ing, *sic*] social justice commitments into mindfulness efforts. The partnership, I believe, has to go both ways if either aspect is to achieve its full potential (Berila 2016: 158-159).”

I emphasize with this how Open Floor can, due to its prominently embodied focus, vitally become such an affirmative participate within an ongoing process of change if it is consciously engaged. Yet, this change then need to be acknowledged as equally important for ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ Open Floor because, I emphasize, the (un)conscious presence of a majority of ‘white, Western, educated, able-bodied, neurotypical, and upper middle-class’ bodies *in* Open Floor cannot be seen apart from a dominating tendency to privilege a similar group of ‘white, Western, educated, able-bodied, neurotypical, upper (middle) class (as well

as/yet also, I add, male<sup>148</sup>)’ bodies also ‘outside’ the practice and organization (see Midgley 2001, Four Arrows 2020, hooks 1984, Holmås 2020, Escobar 2020, Cremin et al. 2018). Open Floor is in this sense *both* influenced by a wider, surrounding field *and* can itself become an affirmative part of transforming these surroundings by relationally engaging its own embodied livings of these processes as they unfold both on the dance floor and in the organizational ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating. The principle of correspondence, therefore - as within, so without; as without, so within - applies with equal relevance as regards ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ Open Floor. I posit in this respect how one of the core ways that we in Open Floor can help contribute to transformation is through daring to engage our own embodied livings of what anti-oppressive scholar and educator Kevin K. Kumashiro (2009) calls our ‘hidden curriculum/lessons’. This is the underlying dynamics and aspects what we are not (yet) fully aware of that we are teaching and learning. “Our hidden lessons demonstrate how it is that oppression can play out in our lives unnoticed and unchallenged (Kumashiro 2009: 41).” Consequently, we need “to conscientiously make visible these hidden lessons and the various lenses students [and, I add, us as teachers] use to make sense of them (Kumashiro 2009: 41).” It is in other words an ‘inner-outer’ process of transformation that starts from ourselves, requiring us to step out of our comfort zones to humbly surrender into a lived engagement with what we do-not-yet-fully-know-and-understand. Kumashiro expresses: “anti-oppressive teaching happens only when we are trying to address the partial nature of our own teaching (Kumashiro 2009: 122).”

It is in this sense interesting to notice one of the first things that Lori expresses when I at a later point during the interview return to this topic of “embodied social justice” by asking

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<sup>148</sup> There is Open Floor, as stated, more who identify as women as compared to men in the organization, amongst teachers, and amongst dancers and movers. This can, in my understanding, at the one hand be seen as an expression for how Open Floor carry a prominent feminist potential, recognizing how empowering and healing it can be for different individuals and groups to engage themselves in a space that is for once *not* dominated by the patriarchal gaze. At the other hand, it can also be seen as an expression for how Open Floor in some ways helps (re)produce stereotypical gender roles, considering how it is in many contexts still (un)consciously considered ‘less acceptable’ for men as compared to women to dance.

her about “how [she] experience[s] that challenge [of “embodied social justice”]. [She], as an embodied process. What is going on with [her], and (...) what are these... challenges? What is the... tension, and...” (I am at this point notably interrupted in my question by an eager and (com)passionate Lori) is: “yeah! This is a great subject because... I'm the student now. (...) I am one hundred percent a student. I have nothing to teach anybody... (...) And it's... (...) the beauty of it (...) and (...) you know, the pain of it (...) it's a subject where... I'm aware of my own ignorance.” With this, Lori gratefully invites me into a humbling and, precisely because of this humility involved, insightful conversation through which we can both let go of the need to already know and have all the answers ready to instead co-grapple our way towards an imperfect field of relational insights that are not-yet-fully-emerged. With it, furthermore, Lori already touches upon a key and vital element as regards how we in Open Floor can potentially become affirmative participants within an ‘internal-external’ process of change, tapping into our individual and shared imperfect potentials for embodied and relational co-transformation. In the following, it is this imperfect, relational, and, vitally, *embodied* endeavor of change that I intend to deeper, yet incompletely, explore.

#### **4.7.7 Compassionately Moving With rather than Away From**

Continuing her response to my question above, Lori emphasizes how she can at times also experience highly uncomfortable sensations when she honestly and authentically commits to engaging such a lived process of “embodied social justice” described. She tends in this context, as stated, to engage her reality of being “a white person” in the US particularly, explaining how much of the discomfort that she experiences connects to a “really... really strong” “tendency to (...) feel shame” when she recognizes how she has in many ways - due to what she names her previous “unconsciousness” in her sharing below - been



unintentionally “complicit” in the “perpetration of people of color [her] whole life.”<sup>149</sup> She therefore accentuates how it is essential for her to find ways to stay “awake and embodied” so that she can use this “shame in a useful way, not to collapse or move away from the feeling” but rather “move with it.” This is because, as Lori expresses it, “if [she] get[s] lost (...) outside [her] window of tolerance, [she is] not gonna be very useful.”

*Lori: you know (...) when one... as a white person (...) I have become aware of things... where (...) [previously] I didn't even know, or... where I... could be horrified... about overt racism, of course, but then... avert my gaze... to something else. (...) So I could be horrified and then let it go. Eh... and in the recognition of the... privilege that I have... grown up in [as a white person]... and the consequent...*

Lori has been looking down and to side, seemingly constantly searching for the right words to speak. With the next word, however, she raises her gaze and looks straight at me again.

“*unconsciousness,*” she confirms in a solid and centered manner. “*And the unconsciousness was not benign, the unconsciousness... was part of the harm... that has been done to people of color. I mean, the grave harm, the unbearable... amount of harm...*”

Lori draws a long and audible inhale that seems to include a felt sense of pain. She (self)compassionately exclaims:

*Lori: the tendency to (...) feel shame... is really... really strong! (...) And you... need to... be awake and embodied to use the shame... in a useful way, not to collapse or move away from the feeling. So... to move with it (...), literally, I mean, move with it (...).*

Lori begins to linger on an ‘um’ sound while she appears to be thinking about what to say next. After some time, she begins - “*but that I really recognize the connection here with... um...*” - but then suddenly seems to change the main focus of her sentence:

*Lori: sometimes the recognition [of that shame and what it includes] is so painful for me... that (...) I can only stay on it... for a little while. As long as I'm processing it just with my mind and my emotions.... that ‘Au! Oh! God, I feel horrible, I (...) feel such shame... that I was complicit in this [the harm done towards people of color] my entire life. Um... and I should know better, and... I call myself a conscious person’. And... you know, I can go into all kinds of... stories about that (Lori inhales quickly). (...) And so... the awareness of that without... flooding... or, you know... fleeing or fighting, or (...) the language we use in Open Floor (...) ‘woooaah! I... can feel... the physical... (...) indicators that I am heading out of my window of tolerance. (...) And (...) [so] recognizing in your own body.... when you're starting to (...) tense... and close. (...) And what works for me about [this approach to embodied social justice/embodied antiracism work] is... if I get lost (...) outside my window of tolerance, I'm not gonna be very useful (she shakes her head). (...) It's about tolerating*

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<sup>149</sup> Much of what Lori expresses in the following is spoken in relation to an additional learning program that she, at the time of the interview, had commenced to explore antiracism from an embodied perspective. Lori does not describe too many details about the structure of this program, yet she highlights how they were working in “a white group” with “white people training white people.” They might therefore, I imagine, have worked with the lived implication (Rothberg 2019) and the possible transformation that one embodies as a white person in the US (and beyond?) particularly.

*discomfort. It doesn't mean... you have to flee, or shut down, or defend yourself, or... (...) [But] I have to learn to be uncomfortable... and stay present (...) and use that discomfort.*

From here, furthermore, Lori emphasizes how she can recognize the potential for working this way in and through Open Floor:

***Lori:** I think there is a natural marriage between [embodied social justice/embodied antiracism work] (...) and Open Floor. I mean (...) there's such a connection... about... staying present ... being aware... knowing what... your... physical or emotional... or mental habits are... when you're uncomfortable... where do you go? (...) Where do we disappear to? Eh... it's completely applicable (...) in terms of social justice.*

A bit later, moreover:

***Lori:** I'm very grateful... to have spent my life doing embodiment work... because it gives me... some understanding, some visceral understanding... of... working with that [the aspects mentioned above]. And... it's still hard. It's still hard. (...) But I am... learned how to be willing... to show up for hard.*

What Lori brings attention to concerns with this an aspect that I have touched upon at several points throughout the inquiry. It relates to how embodied processes of exploration can also unfold various disquieting sensations because they move to touch a hitherto 'hidden' field of insights that a purely cognitive engagement cannot access alone (see Pearce 2020, van der Kolk 2014, Menakem 2021). This 'hidden' field can, as engaged, unfold challenging sensations out of personally lived experiences of trauma, oppression, violence, and similar - which thus in and by itself require a careful and skillful approach of embodied resourcing and co-regulation (see also Caldwell and Leighton 2018, Johnson, R 2018, Badenoch 2017, Siegel 2011). Yet, as Lori highlights, it can also unfold these sensations out of authentically realizing - in an embodied sense - the trauma, oppression, violence, and more that are suffered by others. It can be particularly pertinent if one, such as Lori above, simultaneously realizes how one might oneself be implicated in (Rothberg 2019), part of, and, in Lori's words, "complicit in" this suffering and harm that is being felt.

The previously discussed notions of safe-enough (Porges 2011, 2017) and windows of tolerance/presence (Siegel 2011, Open Floor International 2017: 133), which Lori have hinted at above, re-emerges with this as vital. Based upon the corresponding reality between

‘inner’ and ‘outer’, I affirm how abilities to stay open for and engage transformation ‘without’ deeply intertwine with a founding field of safe-enough and openness ‘within’ - as well as vice versa. It is therefore crucial to find ways to manifest transformation in manners that help individuals and collectives expand rather than rupture their windows of tolerance/presence, supporting them to stay present and engaged rather than, as Lori phrases it, “flooding... or (...) fleeing or fighting.” As previously highlighted in relation to Beausoleil and LeBaron: “when one feels under stress, threat, or shame (...) it is more difficult to remain receptive to unfamiliar people or ideas or to create novel responses to conflict (Beausoleil and LeBaron 2013: 137).” Consequently, “if we wish to shift dynamics to those conducive to learning and change, it proves vital to engage the(...) unconscious regulation systems that determine whether we are in fact open to the unfamiliar and change at all (Beausoleil and LeBaron 2013: 137).” To emerge a truly transformative endeavor, therefore, one *needs*, I underline, to elicit individual and collective processes of resourcing, (re)connection, resilience, and more rather than only/primarily of shame, judgment, disconnection, and others. This is because transformation relies upon such an open enough field of authentic and present relational engagement.

I do in this context *not* argue for a bypassing process that (un)intentionally tries to sidestep or avoid the suffering, injustice, oppression, and more that is involved. Rather, I argue for an interconnected understanding of embodied life and a resourced enough web of relational engagement that can help manifest crucial and, vitally, *(re)connective* processes, of, for example, empathy, care, compassion, understanding, and even, I propose, love (see Kaur 2022, hooks 2001, Hanh 2006). Building on Lederach, I argue how a key aspect of peace work is to find new and different ways to “move from isolation and attitudes of ‘dominate or be dominated’ toward a capacity to envision and act on the basis that we live in and form part of a web of interdependent relationships (...) (Lederach 2005: 173).” We hence need to

(re)cultivate our capacities to “imagine [our]selves in a web of relationship (Lederach 2005: 34),” recognizing “that ultimately the quality of our life is dependent on the quality of life of others (Lederach 2005: 35).” It is thus a practice and art of peaces that re-confirms the web of interbeing discussed, underlining how, as engaged, “you cannot just *be* by yourself alone; you have to inter-be with every other thing (Hanh 2017: 28. Emphasis in original).” As Martínéz Guzmán contends: “in a ‘genuine’ (...) search for (...) peace, I do not find myself with myself alone (...) but rather profoundly feel (...) the interpellation of others (Martínéz Guzmán 2005: 149. Translated from Spanish by author)<sup>150</sup>.”

My attention is in this sense brought towards the “really... really strong” “tendency to (...) feel shame” that Lori highlights. I have in this context, in relation to Marisu, previously discussed shame as the “*intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging* (Brown 2012: 69. Emphasis in original),” emphasizing how shame can often lead to a fear-driven and rigid attempt to ‘hide’ and ‘get rid of’ certain ‘parts’ of oneself. As regards my personal shame response, I have moreover described how this process of shame can often emerge as a contact-reducing force, telling me (and others) how I need to *not* be seen, *not* be heard, *not* be touched. In this respect, researchers in psychology at the Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia, Mikaela Cibich, Lydia Woodyatt and Michael Wenzel (2016) contend how it is not shame itself that is problematic but the aspect of how shame is often left unaddressed and avoided. Shame, thus, is a natural, adaptive, and even pro-social emotion that can help mend social relations by motivating individuals and collectives to engage in action for social repair. Nevertheless, for this social repair to be possible, shame needs to be authentically felt, acknowledged, and taken responsibility for, requiring an approach that can help individuals and collectives stay present with rather than avoid their shame in helpful and resourced enough manners. Cibich

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<sup>150</sup> En una “genuina” (...) búsqueda de la paz (...) no me encuentro solo conmigo mismo (...), sino que siento profundamente (...) la interpelación de los otros y las otras.

et al. mention several different dynamics that can help this shame be transformed, including the belief that social repair is possible, the understanding of self (and others) as changeable and dynamic rather than fixed, the unfolding of (self)compassion and imperfection rather than rigid perfection, stigma, and judgment (Cibich et al. 2016).

Being myself a contact boundary at work who can, at times, deeply resonate with this “really... really strong” “tendency to (...) feel shame” that Lori emphasizes, especially when I, as a ‘Western and white’ woman, honestly commit to unfolding my research, Open Floor teaching, and personal existence in manners that can help co-manifest authentic possibilities for social transformation, I underline how the embodied capacity to “move with” rather than “away from” shame and discomfort that Lori highlights is key. This capacity helps at least me dance through and beyond the limiting tendencies to withdraw and avoid contact with myself and others that my shame would otherwise easily emerge, manifesting instead a process of ‘inner-outer’ empathy and compassion - which Lori has also emphasized related to her ‘inner-outer’ abilities to affirm wholeness before. In this manner, I can support myself through the painful experience that my shame essentially is, expanding into a wider space of empathy, care, and compassion that allows me to recognize - in a much-more-than-only rational sense of it - how the suffering and shame that I feel ‘within’ is in the end not so separated from but rather interpenetrated with the suffering and shame that I sense ‘without’. According to Brach: “compassion for ourselves naturally leads to compassion for others (Brach 2003: 223).” It happens, I believe, because compassion is in the final instance neither purely ‘inner’ nor purely ‘outer’ but, as Brach expresses it, the “flavor of love that arises when we see [the] truth of our shared suffering (Brach 2003: 223).”

According to British clinical psychologist Paul Gilbert, compassion is a basic “kindness, with a deep awareness of the suffering of oneself and of other living things, coupled with the wish and effort to relieve it (Gilbert 2009: xi).” It hence, as also previously

engaged, connects to dynamics of suffering (Koppensteiner 2020: 228), unfolding as a lived capacity to authentically encounter, be present with, and engage the so-called ‘difficult’ experiences that oneself and others live. I therefore arises as a vital source of “resilience, connectedness, and action (Brach 2019: 212)” when faced with life’s challenging realities, manifesting as a grounded, mindful, and active form of caring that is slightly different from empathy alone - the ability to “resonate with others’ positive and negative feelings alike (Singer and Klimecki 2014: R875)” - in that compassion “begins with empathy, but *the crucial element of mindfulness* [embedded in compassion] *protects us from merging or identifying with the pain* (Brach 2019: 212. Emphasis in original, see also Singer and Klimecki 2014).” Compassion, thus, unfolds as a life-affirming ability to *both dare and* be able to include “the vulnerability of this life - all life - in our heart (Brach 2019: xix)” through “the courage to love ourselves, each other, and our world (Brach 2019: xix).”

Professors of conflict analysis and resolution at the George Mason University in Virginia, US, Daniel Rothbart and Susan H. Allen, argue in this respect how compassion can be crucial to include within processes of peacebuilding and conflict transformation because it can help the different actors involved see each other as multifaceted beings rather than as one-dimensional ‘enemies’. It can with this foster a core “recognition of the hardships, suffering, pain, and vulnerability of [each other], which is critical to humanizing the other (Rothbart and Allen 2019: 11).” It can in this manner help shift the focus “from ‘my group’ to ‘what we each need to avoid suffering’ (Rothbart and Allen 2019: 12),” helping a lived sense of *interconnection* rather than *disconnection* to emerge. Instead of a polarizing ‘us’ vs. ‘them’, ‘me’ vs. ‘you’, compassion taps into a reconciling both-and. In a similar vein, Hanh describes how a core practice for peaces is to help one another understand each other’s suffering, going “to the one side and describe the suffering being endured by the other side, and then go to the other side and describe the suffering being endured by the first side (Hanh

1987: 70).” This is because, to loosely paraphrase Hanh’s metaphorical way of phrasing it, those working for peace need to learn to write not only good protest letters but also meaningful and transformative love letters (Hanh 1987: 79).

I do in this context not claim that such an embodied approach to compassionate (re)connection and relational transformation is either an easy, the only, or a universal answer to social endeavors of change. On the contrary, I acknowledge, first, how it can be immensely challenging to “move with” rather than “away from” discomfort and shame in this manner, honestly daring to stay present with and engage our individual and shared realities rather than fleeing, fighting, or freezing. Furthermore, I agree with Lori below in that “dancing is not the answer to everything. It's really not. (...) But I see its value.” As such, the embodied approach to relational transformation and embodied (re)connection that I have argued is *one* potential way of working with peaces, carrying its particular strength in that it moves to touch those deeply (*re*)connective moments of shared embodied vulnerability, imperfection, and compassionate acknowledgement of ‘inner-outer’ realities. This approach needs however, I affirm, to be fundamentally grounded in the lived realities of different individuals and groups, thus not bypassing anger, rage, experiences of injustice, fear, and others but, to (para)phrase Kaur, include it all in an ongoing ‘labor of love’ as means to help both oneself and others manifest more of the possibility “to live in this world without the burden of hate (Kaur 2022: 139).” It is hence a continuous practice and art that does not come from taking the ‘easy way out’ but from constantly committing to the challenging, rewarding, humbling, and transformative process of, as stated, recognizing “that ultimately the quality of our life is dependent on the quality of life of others (Lederach 2005: 35).” In this respect, Lori expresses, towards the end of our interview encounter, how “one of the things that... [she] loved for many years... about... meeting people through the dance (...)” is exactly that “there was a closeness... from doing this work together (...) a getting to know

each other... from the perspective of essence”. This “essence”, moreover, is, I believe, another way of phrasing the continuous and paradoxical process of wholeness.

*Lori: one of the things that... I loved for many years... about... meeting people through the dance (...). There was a closeness... from doing this work together (...) a getting to know each other... from the perspective of essence (Lori nods her head). (...) And so... when we're looking at... connection and peace, and... um... compassion, which is a very big... element in any kind of peace. Whether it's with your roommate or with... another culture (...)*

Lori draws her breath and sighs in an audible manner while she looks to her side, moistens her lips, begins to smile in a slight yet (self)compassionate manner, shakes her head, and then looks straight at me.

*Lori: it's really hard to hate someone you're dancing with (she pauses her words for a long time). Now getting people to dance together is the art form. (...) But that's (...) the work we're taking on. (...) And... when people start to move and start to get closer to the essence... of their humanity... because it is something that all human beings share... of all cultures... there isn't a culture that doesn't dance that I know of (...) We drop into... we can, we have the possibility... to drop into a place that... we're one species... We're one species of... birds with many [different] colors.*

A bit later, she adds:

*Lori: I don't want to sound like I'm oversimplifying it, and... dancing is not the answer to everything. It's really not. (...) It's just what I happen to have... taken on in this life. But I see its value. I have seen it again and again. Whether it's, you know... just a couple who are divorced... on the same dance floor. And they have to figure out how to be on the dance floor with each other. (...) And, you know... (...) we've [all] been divorced from each other. It's a global (...) harm. It's a global wound. And... so... how do we reconcile that?*

There are in this sense two core elements - in addition to the *embodied, movement-oriented, resource-based, and relational* elements already engaged in this subchapter - that I want to highlight as regards how Open Floor can potentially become an affirmative part of such a (re)connective endeavor of lived, embodied transformation if intentionally engaged. It concerns, first, how Open Floor, as mentioned, is a *facilitated* practice and how it can therefore help ‘enable’ and ‘make easier’ (Koppensteiner 2020: 170) a space that is simultaneously challenging and safe enough for transformation to occur. It can happen, amongst others, because of the dynamic interplay between boundaries and openness discussed, which makes it possible to create a space that *both* offers potentials for being ‘out of balance’ *and* a resourced and safe enough frame that makes this ‘out of balance’ helpful and affirmative. Open Floor can in this sense help guide an endeavor that honors what Lori



expresses when she states that “if [she] get[s] lost (...) outside [her] window of tolerance, [she is] not gonna be very useful” *and*, at the same time, that honors what Tamara expresses when she states that “part of diversity work is [also] breaking the bubble of safety.”

The second element that I emphasize concerns an aspect that I have not yet discussed in much depth, yet which I have come to realize is key. It has been briefly mentioned by Imraan related to the “value system” of Open Floor International but it is, for natural reasons, Lori, as one of the founders of Open Floor, who gives it a more prominent focus. She highlights in this respect how Open Floor, as a practice and organization, is now “finally at a stage where... the people who founded it, meaning... [she, Lori] and... Andrea [Juhan] and Kathy [Altman] and... Vic [Cooper]... can start to... step back and not hold the whole thing.” Lori importantly “love[s]” this dynamic because “[they, the four founders of Open Floor] were very clear.... when [they] started this [Open Floor]... that... [they] want the next generation [of Open Floor members] to... change it. [They] don't want it to be... a static form because static... becomes stale.” With it, furthermore, Lori hopes that Open Floor can continue to unfold as “a very alive practice.”

*Lori: we're finally at a stage where... the people who founded it [Open Floor], meaning... me and... Andrea [Juhan] and Kathy [Altman] and... Vic [Cooper]... can start to... step back and not hold the whole thing. (...) And... what I love about it is that... it's [Open Floor] gonna change.*

Lori smiles while she looks at me, softly affirming her words with a calm pause.

*Lori: and (...) we [the four founders of Open Floor] were very clear.... when we started this... that... we want the next generation to... change it. We don't want it to be... a static form because static... becomes stale. (...) And [so] we wanted the next... generation of... brilliant... beings [new Open Floor members] who are... stepping up in the world to make it their own (Lori passionately changes her voice to a faster, higher pitched, and even more enthusiastic expression) And so I'm watching the people stepping up and I... I get the chills! I get so excited... when I see people... taking the... helm and... they're doing things, I'm going 'wow! I never would have thought of that!' (she grounds her expression in a calmer and lower-pitched voice again). (...) And it [the possibility to continuously change and adapt Open Floor] is... definitely... legally arranged... so that who's ever doing it [teaching and engaging Open Floor]... can do it the way they want to do it. (...) I hope that will keep it alive (...) to hand them [the new generation of Open Floor members]... trust and freedom... to create. I think will make it a very alive practice.*

Lori emphasizes with this an element that is perhaps not so ‘outwardly visible’, yet which I see as key as regards how Open Floor can continue to dynamically unfold new embodied peace potentials. It concerns how Open Floor is, as mentioned, embedded in a *dynamic organizational structure* - dynamic governance/sociocracy (see chapter 3.1.2) - which allows it to keep embodying and living many of the same processes that the practice teaches. It can with this keep integrating aspects such as embodied relationality, dynamism, and openness for change also in the ways that decisions are made, trainings are designed, actions are implemented, as well as more. This helps the practice and organization stay open for ongoing change and dynamic transformation along with the ever-changing world that it is embedded within. On a personal level, I deeply appreciate this aspect because I have also experienced harmful consequences when this dynamic quality has *not* been present in other spaces and contexts. The fact that it is exactly Lori - one of the founders of Open Floor - who so passionately talks about “step[ing] back and not hold the whole thing,” therefore, fills me with hope as I realize how Open Floor, even if we might still need to engage different dynamics, for example related to “embodied social justice”, in new and different ways, *can* continue to engage these dynamics in transformative and meaningful manners as we, the people that *are* Open Floor, continuously recognize and dare engage how important this process is.

With this, Lori and I have throughout this subchapter co-engaged our way through an ‘inner-outer’ dance of integration (and differentiation) that has based its movements upon an understanding of embodied wholes as ever-changing processes, as well as upon a dynamic web of interbeing (Hanh 2017). We have in this sense, first, co-explored an ‘inner’ process of affirming oneself *as* (already) whole, continuously engaging an endeavor of including all what (one) *is* as means to also unfold new, life-affirming possibilities. Amongst others, we have engaged a soulful and (in)spirited art and practice of presence, which helps one tap into

the dynamic dance of life. Furthermore, we have explored how this ‘inner’ process of affirming wholeness ‘within’ also intertwine with the ‘outer’ process of affirming wholeness ‘without’ - as well as vice versa. We have in this sense, amongst others, co-engaged the web of interbeing (Hanh 2017) discussed, as well as the compassionate and (re)connective ability to see the “soul”, “essence”, and “heart” - wholeness - of others “a little more quickly.” Finally, we have entered the not-yet-fully emerged endeavor of “embodied social justice,” imperfectly exploring how we in Open Floor can potentially become affirmative participants within an ‘internal-external’ process of transformation through (self)compassionately daring to “move with” rather than “away from” our shame, discomforts, as well as embodied livings of structural (dis)privileges, inclusions/exclusions, inequalities, and more. What has in this context emerged out of this multifaceted ‘inner-outer’ dance of integration (and differentiation) that Lori and I have engaged, is, I affirm, six core elements involved in the ways that Open Floor can potentially help unfold embodied peace possibilities. They are: Open Floor as a practice that is 1) *embodied*, 2) *movement-oriented*, 3) *resource-based*, 4) *relational*, 5) *facilitated*, and 6) embedded into a *dynamic organizational structure*. With this, I am noticeably also approaching a concluding expression to this research endeavor.

# SETTLE

*I breathe*

*inhaling with my feet  
in the dew-covered grass, and  
exhaling with my palms  
facing the sun  
spacious, I am  
in the process of becoming*

*who am I?  
where have I been?  
how am I going?*

*I sink  
into the ground, and  
exhale while I  
allow  
my spine to surrender*

*to the soil  
that animates my feet  
and the air that  
pulsate  
my existence*

*I am*

*in the inhaling and*

*exhaling*

## A Concluding: Arriving at an Embodied Continuation

'*Cogito, ergo sum*'. 'I think, therefore I am' (Descartes 2017a: 25). This research has in many ways unfolded out of the (un)consciously lived implications that I have myself noticed, felt, experienced, embodied, struggled with, lived by, resisted, and sought to transform throughout the course of my life related to the 'disembodied' onto-epistemological heritage that this famous sentence - along, of course, with other 'Western' philosophical arguments and understandings - has helped cement and reinforce in especially yet not exclusively 'Western' manners of being, becoming, knowing, and relating. It is in this sense a sentence that keep influencing both me and my surroundings in felt and embodied ways, having helped pave the way for a deep, painful split between 'body' and 'mind' - material and immaterial - that is still influential in conscious and unconscious manners.

I have because of this unfolded a research that has sought to explore, understand, and help transform these 'disembodied' ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating through purposefully (re)engaging embodied ones. I have therefore based my exploration upon the conscious dance and movement practice that I practice and teach: *Open Floor*, thus being able to explore this embodied peace fabric through a field that I carry rich, meaningful, and, precisely, embodied experience within. I notably consider this personal and embodied anchoring that I do as being vital *both* for the research topic *and* as regards a wider act of 'epistemic disobedience' (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, Mignolo 2009) that I have also sought to contribute to. With it, I have engaged a lived web of *embodied peaces*, which I have imperfectly described as a web of peaces that manifests out of a wholeness-oriented and dynamic affirmation of embodied being, becoming, knowing, and relating. Embodied peaces are therefore holistic, relational, interconnected, and, obviously, embodied, yet also imperfect, paradoxical, ever-transforming, contradictory, multifaceted, and contextualized. I have in this respect, amongst others, leaned upon a transrational peace philosophy (Dietrich

2012, 2013, 2018, Echavarría Alvarez et al. 2018, Koppensteiner 2020, Ditzel Facci 2020, Tjersland and Ditzel Facci 2019) to focus on peaces as a continuous movement through and between manifold homeostatic (dis)equilibriums, emphasizing wholeness-oriented and relational engagement, systemic transformation, and ongoing *both* differentiation *and* integration. I have furthermore defined two core aspects involved in the key notion of *embodied/embodiment*, which concern embodied existence as a process of 1) *paradoxical wholeness* and 2) ‘inner-outer’ *relationality*.

The research question(s) that I have applied to guide my exploration read(s):

### **In which ways can Open Floor help unfold embodied peaces?**

- 1) Which dynamics do embodied peaces include? How are these dynamics embedded in Open Floor?
- 2) How does a Cartesian-inspired splitting between ‘body’ and ‘mind’ influence and restrict embodied ‘inner-outer’ peace possibilities? How can these dynamics transform?
- 3) In which ways have practicing Open Floor unfolded embodied peace potentials in the lives of longer-term Open Floor practitioners (teachers)? Are there also limitations and/or further possibilities to Open Floor in this regard?

Throughout the inquiry, I have explored meaningful answers to this research question(s) through a narrative methodology that has helped me tap into narratives and stories as the basic lens for *understanding*, *interpreting*, as well as *gathering information* as regards the research question(s). I have therefore applied ‘narrative thinking’ (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, Kim 2016) throughout the research endeavor, building from the basic understanding of humans as narrative and storied beings that largely make meaning and sense out of their experiences through the ways that they narrate these experiences to themselves and each other (in verbal and more-than-verbal manners). I have in this context defined narratives and stories as embodied rather than ‘disembodied’ processes, building on Gendlin’s (1997, 2004, 2007) philosophy of language to argue how words and the felt sense are not incompatible opposites but dynamic partners in an interrelated flow. Stories and narratives are thus 1) *dynamic and holistic meaning-making processes* and 2) represent powerful potentials for

*intimate, relational encounters*. As a main methodological choice, I have conducted in-depth, qualitative, and narrative interviews with seven long-term Open Floor practitioners (teachers), relationally listening to the many stories, insights, and reflections that these teachers share connected to their lived dance and movement experiences. Particularly, I have asked them about how they have changed and transformed through practicing Open Floor.

What have I in this context come to deeper understand as regards *the ways in which Open Floor can help unfold embodied peaces*? What answers have I encountered in relation to my research question(s)? In the two first theoretical chapters, I have approached some basic insights concerning the two first families of sub questions that I have applied. In chapter 2, I have explored lived implications that can manifest out of a Cartesian-inspired ‘mind-body’ heritage, inquiring into metaphors, qualities, ways of being, becoming, knowing, and relating that can evolve out of such a ‘disembodied’ engagement with oneself and the world. I have importantly done it through an *empathic* and *compassionate* process of knowing, helping me to transformatively understand rather than merely criticize how and why individuals and collectives engage ‘disembodied’ dynamics this way. I have in this context accentuated how humans, on ontological levels, cannot truly be disembodied, but how I understand ‘disembodiment’ (with inverted commas) to manifest as an experiential possibility that humans, *as embodied wholes*, are capable of.

I have in this sense realized how *one of the core ways in which a Cartesian-inspired ‘mind-body’ split influences and restricts embodied ‘inner-outer’ peace possibilities* concerns how an (un)conscious idea of atomism - which I, based on Midgley (2001), have defined as the idea that the only way to know something is to break it into its smallest possible ‘parts’ and from this starting point attempt to make out how these ‘parts’, much like a machine, also ‘fit together’ - helps evolve multiple ways of ‘disembodied’ being, becoming, knowing, and relating both ‘within’ and ‘without’. This atomistic understanding leaves little

room for embodied wholeness, as one rather (un)consciously splits embodied wholes into static, hierarchical, and distinct ‘inner parts’, as well as radically separates the ‘inner’ from the ‘outer’. This noticeably carries lived and important consequences, considering how embodied peaces are about affirmatively engaging rather than trying to ‘control’ or avoid the multifaceted and interconnected field that embodied existence is. *Embodied peaces hence include an intertwined fabric of multiple embodied-relational dynamics*, in which context I have emphasized ongoing dynamism, paradoxical both-and inclusion, as well as ‘inner-outer’ (re)connection. As regards how *‘disembodied’ dynamics can potentially transform*, I therefore underline a dynamic and intertwined engagement with *both* ‘inner’ *and* ‘outer’ as well as *both* bottom-up *and* top-down dynamics as means to affirmatively (re)engage embodied wholeness rather than ‘split it into parts’. It includes, for example, the metaphorical engagement of self as process rather than as fixed entity (Epstein 1995), the insights of plastic paradoxes (Doidge 2007), the awareness of how ‘pleasure’ and ‘pain’ cannot be held apart (Damasio 2018, Pearce 2020), the importance of also *disequilibriums* (Doidge 2007, Diamond 2007), the crucial sensations of safe enough (Porges 2011, 2017), the ongoing practice of widening rather than rupturing ‘windows of tolerance’ (Siegel 2011).

In chapter 3, I have furthermore engaged Open Floor. I have in this sense *described* Open Floor as a conscious dance and movement practice, which implies that it does not teach fixed dance steps or choreographies but works in process-oriented manners with the spontaneous dance and movement expressions that arise ‘within’ and between those who are present. I have moreover emphasized the fundamental dynamism that is involved in Open Floor, which, amongst others, builds from how the initial founders and founding members of Open Floor International wanted to manifest Open Floor as a practice that builds upon a vast pool of embodied wisdom rather than a strict school of thought, as well as a practice that can be continuously ‘remixed’ in collaborative ways depending on the ever-changing focuses and



needs of those who engage it. It therefore also involves how Open Floor International is structured according to dynamic governance/sociocracy (Rau and Koch-Gonzalez 2018), how Open Floor is licensed under creative commons (n.a), as well as how the core values of Open Floor International are, amongst others, articulated to emphasize ongoing exploration, inclusion, and transformation.

Through additionally engaging the different elements that are involved in the Open Floor curriculum - including ‘embodied anchors’, ‘movement as continuums’, ‘the movement cycle’, ‘the 4x4 weave of experience’, and ‘core movement resources’ - I have imperfectly *reflected upon how the dynamics of embodied peaces are embedded in Open Floor*. I have in this sense emphasized how Open Floor tends to engage the human dance as an ever-transforming process that emerges in new and different ways through and between embodied-relational wholes, and, furthermore, how Open Floor sees this embodied-relational dance to emerge as a paradoxical web that includes *both* differentiated ‘parts’ *and* an undivided whole. In addition, I have underlined how Open Floor is an *elicitive* rather than prescriptive practice (Lederach 1995), especially related to its movement-oriented and resource-based focus. Furthermore, I have *critically* started to engage how Open Floor - as with all practices and fields - carries *both* sociocultural strengths *and* sociocultural blind spots/limitations. This is particularly pertinent related to a currently ‘limited’ diversity of bodies that seems to be fully and authentically included in the practice and field. I have therefore also found it essential to explore some key sociocultural and historical contexts that move behind Open Floor, including conscious dance and movement, Gabrielle Roth and the 5Rhythms practice, the Human Potential Movement and humanistic/transpersonal approaches to psychology, as well as diverse fields of interest that the initial founders and founding members brought with them into Open Floor. In this way, I can incompletely begin to understand how and why these different strengths and blind spots/limitations of Open Floor might move as they do.

In the main explorative chapter 4, I have relationally engaged the in-depth, qualitative, and narrative interviews that I have conducted with seven long term Open Floor practitioners (teachers). I have in this regard tapped into a holistic endeavor of knowing through engaging *hermeneutics of restoration* (Josselson 2004), which implies that I have taken an interpretive leap of faith and believed that the Open Floor teachers have been able and willing to share, to the best of their abilities, “their sense of their subjective experience and meaning making (Josselson 2004: 5).” I have therefore allowed the Open Floor teachers to center and steer the discussion, yet I have also engaged a relational multilogue through including my personal reflections as well as relevant literature. I have notably found this a fruitful way to deeper explore the last family of sub questions that I have engaged, which revolves around *how practicing Open Floor has unfolded embodied peace potentials in seven unique Open Floor teachers’ lives* as well as *how there might also be limitations/further possibilities to Open Floor in this regard*.

In relation to Gunvor, I have explored the vital inclusion of *both* safety/trust *and* novelty/expansion within facilitated spaces because new embodied learning and transformation struggle to evolve if either ‘side’ of this dynamic balance is missing. I have in this context accentuated how humans, as embodied wholes, need to feel *both* (relationally) safe enough *and* be challenged to unfold further possibilities if new and different learning and transformation is to occur. Particularly, I have reflected upon how Open Floor is not only a facilitated practice - with facilitation implying a process of ‘making easier’ and ‘enabling’ (Koppensteiner 2020: 170) - but also an *embodied-relational* one, which can thus, through amongst others a dynamic engagement of this safety/trust-novelty/expansion interplay, help ‘mediate into being’ (Palmer 1993, Lederach 2005) new and different *embodied-relational* possibilities. Gunvor furthermore helps highlight how this embodied-relational process can,

amongst others, happen through facilitating affirmative community experiences where *both* the individually unique *and* the collective shared can be authentically co-involved.

With Marisu, it is the dynamic story of the quiet psychologist with knees that were organizing her life and the interconnected processes of healing (self)acceptance and radical ‘inner-outer’ belonging that she has unfolded thereout, which have stood in the center of our engagement. Marisu has in this sense helped me emphasize the crucial presence of belonging, as well as the active (rather than passive) endeavor of authentic inclusion when it comes to peaces. It is amongst others relevant related to (un)conscious structures of ableist exclusion. We have in this respect, at the one hand, co-discussed how Open Floor can help manifest ‘inner-outer’ potentials for belonging and inclusion through welcoming people to dance and move in accordance with own dance and movement possibilities rather than from ‘outside’ standards, as well as through helping one to heal and transform contact-reducing dynamics of shame by tapping into the core paradox between *both* unconditional (self)acceptance *and* a continuous emergence into further possibilities. At the other hand, we have incompletely engaged how Open Floor still needs to engage a fabric of further possibilities, finding new and different ways to include a wider diversity of individuals and groups within the practice and organization. I have in this respect argued for a two-fold venture of (self)reflexivity (Kester and Cremin 2017), through which we in Open Floor - individually and collectively - can help each other practice saying ‘we’ rather than ‘them’ as we together reflect upon how we are, in different ways, both implicated in (Rothberg 2019) and affected by multiple dynamics and structures of inclusion and exclusion.

Tamara has in turn helped me bring attention to the ongoing possibility to unfold further potentialities, especially as regards embodied relationality. One of the key dynamics that has emerged out of our meeting concerns in this regard the option to not “have to choose between (...) being... authentic and being with people,” emphasizing instead the potential in

Open Floor to facilitate new and different possibilities that allow one to affirmatively co-engage the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ rather than separate and ‘choose between them’. It includes, amongst others, the lived practice of emerging embodied metaphorical shifts, which involves the simultaneous engagement of bottom-up ‘visceral maps’ (Siegel 2011) *and* top-down dynamics of meaning-making that can ‘highlight’ rather than ‘hide’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 10-13) embodied ways. Furthermore, it involves the simultaneous awareness of *both* individual *and* collective responsibility for transformation and change. I have in this context emphasized how Open Floor cannot truly unfold as transformative if it (un)consciously puts all the responsibility for transformation and change on individuals alone. Rather, it needs to co-involve the larger collective realities that individuals and groups are embedded within. Amongst others, it is relevant related to an embodied and paradoxical practice of resourcing oneself in ‘disembodied’ settings, as well as in relation to a ‘risky’ endeavor of actively (rather than “just by ad hoc”) daring to involve embodied difference in more authentically inclusive, life-affirming, and transformative manners.

In connection with Imraan, I have explored an interpersonal path of healing that has centered around “how to be vulnerable. How to be, um... authentic. (...) How to remain in integrity, (...) and, eh... intimacy, exploring intimacy in different ways.” Imraan has in this sense shared multiple relational dynamics from his nearer and farer background, related amongst others to his experiences of growing up as a ‘non-white’ person during the South African apartheid regime. I have in this context touched upon how such experiences of physical and structural violence can elicit trauma responses, yet, through Imraan’s seemingly healing and dynamic way of integrating these experiences, I have focused upon how such experiences can also heal and/or not embed as trauma to begin with through a relational process of *co*-regulation. As Badenoch expresses: “the essence of trauma isn’t events, but aloneness within them (Badenoch 2017: 25).” Even though Open Floor is importantly not

therapy, therefore, Imraan has helped me underline how Open Floor can still support such co-regulative processes through, for example, emerging shared, relational moments of embodied vulnerability, authenticity, integrity, and intimacy. I have in this context arrived at a basic understanding of healing - in contexts of violence and beyond - as an ‘artistic-like expression of resiliency’ (Lederach and Lederach 2010: 227), through which lived ‘flowers of pain’ (Lystad 2020) can be dynamically integrated and transformed (rather than ‘fixed’ or ‘removed’) in an ongoing dance of co-being, co-becoming, co-knowing, and co-relating.

Rivi has furthermore brought my attention towards the soulful and (in)spirited processes of presence, balance, inspiration, and connection that move beyond dynamics of healing alone to directly touch processes of creativity, unfolding, and peaces. It therefore helps highlight how Open Floor can be a resource for peaces also in terms of being an “affirmative practice for an active life (Koppensteiner 2009: 175).” I have in this regard defined ‘soul’ as a wholeness-oriented process of embodied balance and integration (rather than a so-called individual ‘essence and core’), which includes sensate, emotional, and mental dynamics yet that is also larger and more-than the coming together of these dynamics alone. ‘Spirit’ I have defined as a wider process, field, and source of wholeness that both *is* and dances beyond this personal process of soul. Rivi has in this sense helped me underline how Open Floor can become part of cultivating such soulful and (in)spirited processes through being a dynamic and wholeness-oriented practice that can help one constantly (re)manifest new and different homeostatic equilibriums rather than waiting for imbalances to grow overpowering and huge. In this context, processes of breathing (re)connections, inspiration, play(fulness), abilities to be present with multiple and even contradictory dynamics, the ongoing interplay between a sensate, spontaneous, and playful “child self” and an aware, reflected, and mindful “adult self,” as well as lived capacities for “resilience,” “fluidity,” and “choice” - in ‘larger’ peace and conflict contexts *and* in ‘smaller’ everyday

processes of balances and imbalances - all become essential. I have therefore also ended up describing embodied peaces as a dynamic dance of, precisely, ‘multiples’.

Together with Stefan, I have explored a felt sense of ease that can say something profoundly meaningful about the paradoxical fabric that embodied peaces are. It is in this sense a felt sense of ease that is imperfect, dynamic, relational, and paradoxical, thus not excluding the effort, the tensions, the pain, but integrating it all into a paradoxical endeavor of living. It hence emerges as an experienced reality and embodied potentiality that is always available in embodied-relational lives, manifesting through and between our capacities to affirm and accept what *is* and our capacities to *choose* a certain direction to dance. Stefan and I have in this respect discussed how Open Floor can potentially help nourish such a felt sense of ease through, amongst others, cultivating a spacious capacity to ‘*romme*’. It implies to include and engage both what *is* and what can also become through an endeavor that is simultaneously bounded, solid, and contractive enough as well as open, soft, and expansive enough. In this manner, one can be and become one’s “whole, full register as human.” Furthermore, we have engaged how Open Floor can also help manifest this felt sense of ease through an affirmative endeavor of languaging, through which embodied words that ‘make sense’ (Gendlin 1997, 2004, 2007) can support an ‘inner-outer’ process of relational understanding and *trygghet* (sufficient ‘inner-outer’ safety/trust) as well as a potentially healing (re)expression of voice that allows voiceless experiences and even ‘the unspeakable’ (Lederach and Lederach 2010) to be transformed into relational spaces of community, understanding, and love anew. The last word that I have highlighted, ‘love’, is in this respect a process that is vital for embodied peaces at large, moving to emerge those potentially (re)connective moments of shared embodied responsibility, need, and care for *how* our interconnected co-existences evolve.

At the end of the research, Lori has helped me engage the ongoing movement of integration (and differentiation). This integrative move has been relevant *both* in relation to what Lori expresses *and* in relation to a beginning integrative dance that I have started to engage as regards the larger research process. I have in this context arrived at an overall understanding of six core ways in which Open Floor can potentially help unfold embodied peaces. They concern Open Floor as a practice that is 1) *embodied*, 2) *movement-oriented*, 3) *resource-based*, 4) *relational*, 5) *facilitated*, and 6) embedded into a *dynamic organizational structure*. In relation to the *embodied* dimension, Lori and I have discussed how Open Floor can help unfold embodied peace potentials through supporting one to tap into one's own (and other's) embodied existence *as* (already) whole rather than as a 'future wholeness' that (still) needs to be created. It is hence not about what 'should' or 'should not' be, but about lovingly, compassionately, empathically, and with understanding 'melting away' those "constrictions" that keeps one from recognizing and experiencing this wholeness that *is*. It thus interconnects with how Open Floor, as a *movement-oriented* practice, can also help one engage the core paradox of healing, transformation, and peaces engaged, which concerns how transformation and change emerge out of a simultaneous acceptance of what *is* (Brach 2003) and an urge to unfold further possibilities. One can in this manner 'feed (rather than fight) one's demons' (Allione 2008), manifesting a process of emotional healing that allows one to be more of what one *is* and more of what one can also become. Furthermore, through its *resource-based* focus, Open Floor can help cultivate a soulful and (in)spirited process of presence and balance, which, in the final instance, helps one dance with and as the vibrant life dance itself.

As Open Floor is additionally a *relational* practice, it can also help one recognize and engage how this affirmative dance of wholeness 'within' interconnects with and co-unfolds as the affirmative dance of wholeness 'without' - as well as vice versa. One can thus co-engage a dynamic web of *interbeing* (Hanh 2017), manifesting a process of wholeness that is

neither about a ‘separate’ wholeness ‘out there’ nor about an ‘individual essence’ ‘within’ but about an alive web of embodied co-being, co-becoming, co-knowing, and co-relating. Nevertheless, I have, as mentioned, realized how Open Floor still needs to manifest a fabric of further possibilities in this regard. It is amongst others relevant related to what Lori and I, towards the end of our interview, have discussed as the not-yet-fully-emerged endeavor of “embodied social justice.” It relates to how Open Floor also needs to become more authentically inclusive for a broader diversity of individuals and groups, becoming an affirmative participant within an ‘internal-external’ process of change that is not only relevant for ‘inside’ Open Floor but also for the larger contexts and societies that Open Floor is embedded within. I have thus emphasized a *(re)connective* process of honest, compassionate, and relational transformation, underlining how we in Open Floor need to dare explore our own embodied livings of diverse inclusions and exclusions in ways that are *both* resourced *and* courageous enough for transformation to occur. In this respect, the aspect of Open Floor as a *facilitated* practice that can help unfold *both* safety/trust *and* novelty/expansion, as well as Open Floor as a practice that is open for ongoing change through, amongst others, its *dynamic organizational structure*, both (re)emerge as vital.

I have in this sense, out of this multifaceted research exploration of mine, arrived at a concluding expression to this inquiry that revolves around an embodied (re)engagement of wholeness both ‘within’ and ‘without’, as well as a transformative dance of *(re)connection* that allows one to affirmatively recognize and engage this wholeness that (already) *is*. It is in this sense a lived endeavor of wholeness and (re)connection that dances simultaneously ‘inwards’ and ‘outwards’ - towards ‘inner’ (re)connections with one’s personal expressions of wholeness and towards ‘outer’ (re)connections with the interconnected expressions of wholeness of the surroundings - yet that simultaneously also expands beyond this ‘inwards’ and ‘outwards’ to directly touch the vibrant life dance itself. As such, if I am to provide an



overall, yet imperfect answer to my main research question - *in which ways can Open Floor help unfold peaces?* - I would emphasize the potential in Open Floor to, in diverse and multifaceted manners, continuously help cultivate, facilitate, and make possible an embodied experience of and affirmative engagement with this ongoing dance of wholeness that oneself, others, and life (already) *are*. Open Floor can in this respect, through its many embodied-relational movements, explorations, resources, and tools, help individuals and collectives come into new and different contact with, recognize, and realize this ongoing dance of wholeness as well as dynamically keep on exploring, affirming, and engaging this fabric of wholeness as it is continuously becoming differently anew. To say it differently, Open Floor can help individuals and collectives embody and affirm more of what they and others *are*, as well as more of what they and others can constantly also become.

I recognize however how this affirmative dance of wholeness ‘within’ and ‘without’ cannot truly unfold as transformative if it fails to authentically realize the interpenetrating web of interbeing that we are all continuously part of. Open Floor can therefore also not help unfold embodied peaces if the (re)connective dances of wholeness that it helps cultivate are so-called ‘exclusive dances of wholeness’ whose attention and care stop at the edges of our dance floors alone. Rather, we need to manifest attention and care towards our interconnected co-existences, recognizing how “ultimately the quality of our life is dependent on the quality of life of others (Lederach 2005: 35).” As hooks expresses it: “a love ethic presupposes that everyone has the right to be free, to live fully and well (hooks 2001: 87).” I therefore also advocate an ongoing expansion and further transformation of Open Floor, constantly finding new and different ways to unfold further possibilities. In this context, I contend that it is us - the teachers and practitioners who *are* Open Floor - who need to commit ourselves to keep manifesting the classes and workshops that we facilitate and/or participate in as transformative spaces that can help co-emerge affirmative processes of change.

This latter aspect emphasized importantly also brings my attention towards what are potential lines of further inquiries in relation to this research. I have in this sense *not* sought to provide a universal and all-encompassing picture of peaces but engaged a beginning inquiry into a hitherto largely unexplored territory for academia generally and peace research specifically. I have therefore explored how Open Floor can help unfold embodied peaces particularly related to the ‘disembodied’ Cartesian-inspired onto-epistemological heritage that I am/have been embedded within, thus not, as an example, explored how Open Floor can (or cannot) be used as a concrete tool for conflict transformation in a specific conflicting context. Furthermore, I have not engaged all potential experiences and relationships with Open Floor that there are - how could I? - as I have focused upon the lived experiences that the Open Floor teachers who I have interviewed have shared with me as well as how these experiences have resonated with my personal manners of being, becoming, knowing, and relating. In this respect, I propose how one potential line of further inquiry can be to take Open Floor into different contexts, engage different individuals and groups, as well as explore different experiences than what I have currently involved. This can, I contend, also be a way to help emerge Open Floor as more meaningfully relevant and authentically inclusive for a wider diversity of individuals and groups. Nevertheless, if I am to highlight a specific line of further inquiry that currently draws my curiosity, I emphasize the potential in Open Floor to also help cultivate embodied (re)connections and peaceful relationships with and as our shared planetary home and the manifold expressions of life that this planetary home involves. On a personal level, I find that this more-than-human dance of embodied (re)connection and wholeness emerges as pressingly relevant and essential in relation to our ongoing - individual and shared - embodied peace dances.

With this, I am standing at the edge of a research cycle, having arrived at the final movement of settle and the deep exhale into the pregnant moment of stillness. This stillness,

however, is far from an abrupt haltering of movement and a rigid stop into nothingness, but a soft arrival into the embodied continuation that is my life. In this sense, I have unfolded a research endeavor that has authentically been felt as relevant and meaningful for my personal existence. At the same time, it has been immensely difficult due to how it has coincided with the greatest and most painful loss of my life: the ongoing disappearance into dementia and eventual passing of my father. I therefore need to underline how it has throughout this research process also not lacked of reasons for me to leave the inquiry before its completion. I have however not chosen to do so. There has in this sense been something deeper that has kept me dancing. What is it that has kept me committed in this manner, even in the darkest times of my most severe pain? I believe that this 'it' is love. It is the love that runs towards myself, the love that I will always carry for my father, the love that I share with my family and friends, the love that keeps me committed to life, the love that has known - on a deep, embodied level - how I have *needed* to complete this research because it is a meaningful expressions of, exactly, love as I choose to offer it to the world. I am therefore arriving at this embodied continuation that is my life, manifesting the exhale and the settling into the pregnant moment of stillness, with this important insight embedded into my being: whatever I may encounter, whatever I may dance, I have arrived at a place where I *know* - on a deep, embodied level - how I can always access this love and choose to make it steer and guide my movements because I *know* - on a deep, embodied level - that if I have managed to make this love guide and steer my movements through the utterly wild and excruciating Winter of Grief, I can also make it guide and steer my movements through whatever and however I might encounter the dance of my life next. This commitment to and awareness of love, therefore, is in the end the main insight that I leave this embodied research endeavor with.

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# APPENDIXES

## APPENDIX 1

### Interview Structure and Questions (in English)<sup>151</sup>

*Criterion: Open Floor teachers or Open Floor teachers-in-training.*

#### **Start with:**

- *An introduction to the whys and the hows of the interview.*
- *Remind the teachers that the interview will be recorded and that I will take notes.*
- *Ask if the teacher have any question and/or concerns.*
- *Then: a focusing/meditation exercise to include the 4 embodiments and the 4 relational hungers.*

**Big question:** *In which ways do Open Floor teachers (who are also long-term Open Floor practitioners) experience that they have transformed through practicing Open Floor?*

#### **Interview questions (with potential sub-questions):**

- 1) *Can you tell me about how you came into practicing Open Floor as a dancer and mover, and perhaps what drew you/called you towards practicing Open Floor in particular?*
- 2) *What have happened with you as you have been practicing as a dancer/mover: have something changed with you and how you experienced yourself, others, or life in general? Has something changed with how you act, react, or relate to yourself and/or your surroundings? Can you explain how you have felt and noticed these changes?*
- 3) *Have there also been aspects/dynamics/topics that you have noticed have not changed through practicing Open Floor, or that you have perhaps experienced as more difficult to change? Perhaps something that you were hoping or expecting would change, but that either did not happen or happened in a different way? Can you explain how you have felt and noticed these difficulties and/or different ways?*
- 4) *Can you also tell me a bit about how decided to be an Open Floor teacher? What called you towards it and made you decide to invest the time, effort, and money to pursue this teaching path?*

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<sup>151</sup> The interview structure and question that I designed exist both in English and in Norwegian. This is because two of the interviews took place in Norwegian (me) and Swedish or Danish (Open Floor teachers).

- 5) *How have you experienced the process of becoming being an Open Floor teacher (with the transition from student to teacher involved, as well as the practice of teaching)? Was there anything that was particularly transforming, rewarding, or challenging? Can you tell me a bit about how this has also changed you, or perhaps not changed you, as well as your relationship with yourself, others, the world, or with the practice itself?*
- 6) *Anything else that you want to add?*

Some sub-questions to include/be aware of *if necessary*, to bring focus onto dynamics that are not mentioned or not explained in sufficient depth as the conversation unfolds:

- a) *Thinking about the 4 embodiments and the 4 relational hungers: were there some areas that you noticed more or less changes in relation to? Are there areas that are/have been challenging to change?*
- b) *Have you experienced areas/topics in your life where Open Floor could not help you? Where you needed something different than Open Floor? What? How? Why?*
- c) *Any particular part of the Open Floor curriculum that you find/have found especially helpful for you?*
- d) *What would you say is the biggest change from when you started and until now (as a way to sum up)?*

**To end:**

- ***Ask participants about their experience of being interviewed.***
- ***Ask if there are any requests for anonymization.***
- ***Explain the further process.***
- ***Ask if the teachers have any further questions.***

## Interview Structure and Questions (in Norwegian)

*Kriterium: Open Floor lærer eller under utdanning til å bli Open Floor lærer.*

### **Begynn med:**

- *Spør hvilket språk lærerne foretrekker: engelsk eller norsk/dansk/svensk?*
- *En introduksjon til hvorfor og hvordan jeg har tenkt til å utføre dette intervjuet.*
- *Minne lærerne på at intervjuet blir tatt opp, og at jeg kommer til å notere underveis.*
- *Spør om lærerne har noen spørsmål før vi starter.*
- *Så: en fokusert meditasjon for å inkludere de fire kroppslige dimensjonene og de fire relasjonelle behovene.*

**Hovedspørsmål:** *Hvordan erfarer Open Floor lærere (som også har praktisert Open Floor en lang stund) at det å praktisere Open Floor har forandret dem?*

### **Intervju spørsmål (med potensielle underspørsmål):**

- 1) *Kan du fortelle meg litt om hvordan du endte opp med å praktisere akkurat Open Floor? Var det et spesielt aspekt eller noe som var til stede/skjedde i livet ditt som gjorde at du valgte å begynne med Open Floor for eksempel?*
- 2) *Hva har skjedd med deg etter at du begynte å praktisere Open Floor? Har noe forandret seg med deg og hvordan du opplever deg selv, andre, eller - på et større plan - livet i seg selv? Eller i måtene du reagerer, oppfører deg på eller relaterer deg til de/det som er rundt deg? Kan du beskrive hvordan du merker disse forandringene?*
- 3) *Har det også vært aspekter/ områder i livet ditt som ikke har forandret seg gjennom å praktisere Open Floor? Områder det har vært vanskeligere å oppleve en forandring i forhold til? Er det for eksempel noe du trodde eller håpet ville forandre seg, men som ikke gjorde det (eller som skjedde på en annen måte en det du hadde håpet/forventet)? Kan du fortelle meg litt om hvordan du eventuelt har opplevd disse aspektene?*
- 4) *Kan du fortelle meg litt om hvordan du kom til det valget å bli en Open Floor lærer? Hva var det som motiverte og gjorde at du ville dedikere så mye tid, penger og innsats for å kunne undervise akkurat Open Floor?*
- 5) *Hvordan har du opplevd denne prosessen med å bli og å være en Open Floor lærer (med den forandringen det innebærer å gå fra bare å være danser til også å være underviser)? Er det noe i disse prosessene som var/er spesielt viktig for deg? Er det noe som har vært/er spesielt utfordrende? Kan du fortelle meg litt om hvordan denne*

*prosessen har også forandret deg (eller ikke forandret deg) og dine relasjoner til deg selv, til andre, til verden, til livet og til Open Floor? Kan du beskrive hvordan du opplever og legger merke til disse forandringene (eller mangelen på forandring)?*

6) *Er det noe mer du har lyst til å legge til?*

Noen underspørsmål som spørre dersom det *er nødvendig* for å bringe fokus på temaer/aspekter som trenger mer utdypning eller som ikke har vært nevnt.

a) *Med tanke på de fire kroppslige dimensjonene og de fire relasjonelle behovene: er det noen av disse aspekten/områdene hvor du har opplevd mer eller mindre forandring? Er det noe du har opplevd som spesielt uforanderlig?*

b) *Har du opplevd områder/aspekter i livet ditt der Open Floor ikke har kunnet hjelpe deg i særlig stor grad? Er det ganger der du kanskje har trengt noe annet en Open Floor som støtte/praksis? Hva? Hvorfor? Hvordan har du merket det?*

c) *Er det et spesielt element av Open Floor som har vært spesielt viktig for deg?*

d) *Hva vil du si er den største forandringen som har skjedd med deg gjennom å praktisere Open Floor fra du startet og til nå (som en måte å oppsummere)?*

**Til slutt:**

- ***Spør om hvordan lærerne har opplevd intervjuet. Er det noen de vil si om opplevelsen?***
- ***Spør om det er noe behov for å bli anonymisert.***
- ***Forklar den kommende prosessen.***
- ***Spør om det er noen flere spørsmål.***

## **Email to Research Participants**

Dear .....

I am writing you because I am doing my PhD in peace research specifically focused on how Open Floor can be a resource for peace. I have now come to the phase of interviewing long-term Open Floor practitioners, and in this regard I want ask you if you would like to participate in my research through sharing your Open Floor experiences with me.

I am particularly interested in your personal experiences with Open Floor: how you yourself have changed and transformed through engaging with this practice - both on and off the dance floor. It includes the practice of being a dancer and the practice of being a teacher, yet importantly, I am not interviewing you primarily as an expert in the field but as a human being that has experienced Open Floor extensively. I am therefore interested in aspects like: how have you changed (or not changed) your relationship to yourself, to others, or to life in general through practicing Open Floor? And: how do you (or do you not) act differently, react differently, or focus differently through having engaged in this practice? I will ask you different question related to this in the interview, and the important part is that I invite you to share primarily your personal experiences with me rather than your more expert reflections. I want to listen to how you - as a dedicated, long-term, and passionate practitioner - have moved through your own processes of change through practicing Open Floor.

I am very grateful if you choose to share your time and experiences with me. The connections between Open Floor and peace is my big passion, and I hope that I can contribute to a deeper understanding of this field through doing this PhD research of mine.

If you would like to participate, please write me back as soon as possible so that we can together find a time to schedule the interview via Zoom. I will also then send you an informed consent form with more details, which you would have to sign. The interview itself will take approximately **1 - 1,5 hours**, depending on how much you have to share.

Looking forward to hearing from you!

All the best from Hanne Tjersland

## Informed Consent

***Working Title: Unfolding Embodied Peaces through Dance. Open Floor Conscious Dance and Movement Practice as a Transrational Resource for Peace.***

Researcher: Hanne Tjersland, Doctorate Program in International Studies in Peace, Conflict and Development, Universidad Jaume I, Castelló de la Plana, Spain.

Supervisor: Dr. Norbert Koppensteiner

I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study by sharing my personal experiences with Open Floor with the researcher in an interview conducted via an online communication tool, for example Zoom. The purpose of this document is to specify the terms of participation of the interview.

1. I have been given sufficient information about the research project. The purpose of my participation as an interviewee has been explained and is clear. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study. I also understand that I am at any time free to contact the researcher to seek further clarification and information.
2. My participation as an interviewee is voluntary. There is no explicit or implicit coercion whatsoever to participate. I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or withdraw the permission to use the data from my interview. I also understand that the researcher will ask for my final permission before publication.
3. I understand that I can myself choose the level of anonymization I want my experiences to be shared with in this research, and I have been given the possibility to do so. I will agree with the researcher personally about the specific requests I have in this matter. I have been given the guarantees that the researcher will respect my decisions and that the level of confidentiality I wish to obtain will be respected.
4. I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially and with respect. The researcher may quote extracts from the interview in her work, for example yet no limited to: the dissertation, published, papers, and conference presentations.
5. I understand that participation involves being interviewed by the researcher. I understand that I in this regard have the right to not answer any question I am asked, and that if I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview, I have the full right to withdraw.
6. I allow the researcher to take written notes during the interview. I also allow the interview to be audio and video recorded via the recording option of the online communication tool used.



7. I have read and understood the points and statements of this form.

Signature of research participant

----- (Date, Place, Signature)

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

----- (Date, Place, Signature)

## List of Symbols/Markings in Direct Quotes from Interviews

Symbol/Marking	Explanation
...	Pauses in the speaking (by the Open Floor teacher or myself).
(...)	Places where I have omitted passages from the original speaking in my re-rendering of the quotes.
(text inside parentheses)	Places where I have added description of non-verbal communication that happens during the speaking (by the Open Floor teacher or myself).
[text inside brackets]	Places where I have added clarifying points to the quotes due to, for example, implicit meanings that are not easily visible in the written re-rendering of the originally spoken words.
<u>Text that is underlined</u>	Words that are emphasized in the tonality of the original speaking (by the Open Floor teacher or myself).
(---) in footnotes with translations into Swedish, Danish, or Norwegian (only relevant for the interviews with Gunvor and Stefan).	Marks places where I have in the English version of the quote, in the main body of the text, added descriptions of non-verbal communication that happens during the speaking. = (text inside parentheses), see above.
[---] in footnotes with translations into Swedish, Danish, or Norwegian (only relevant for the interviews with Gunvor and Stefan).	Marks places where I have in the English version of the quote, in the main body of the text, added clarifying points to the quotes due to, for example, implicit meanings that are not easily visible in the written re-rendering of the originally spoken words. = [text inside brackets], see above.