

Dancing with the Spirits, Act 1: 'Being grounded and being able to fly are not mutually exclusive'¹

Eline Kieft

Let the power of the circle flow through you. We are going to dance with the spirits. We are hopefully going to have some fun. And it may even change your life. But that doesn't mean you can't have fun! (Jonathan's dedication, in workshop notes, 24 July 2012)

Abstract

This article is the first of a diptych, to discuss a particular approach to dancing with the spirit world, from a contemporary shamanic perspective as taught by the Scandinavian Center for Shamanic Studies. It emerges from my participation in the *Spirit Dance Workshop* from June 24-29, 2012 in Sweden with Jonathan Horwitz and Zara Waldebäck, which in turn led to interviewing them over Skype on August 9, 2016. After methodological reflections on source-justification, personal immersion and embodied enquiry, this article introduces the concept of spirits in (this) shamanic context and discusses the possibility and etiquette of relating with other-than-human-beings through dance. It contemplates the notion of power and empowerment, drawing from three concrete examples of dancing with the spirit of a tree, the spirit of the night, and the spirit of a power animal. Instead of a conclusion, I offer an Entre'Act as a an in-between, linking this first Act/Article/Acticle of the diptych, with the second to come, which will focus on community, ceremony and performance.

Keywords

Shamanism (neo-, core-, contemporary-)
Animism
Power & Empowerment
Jonathan Horwitz & Zara Waldebäck
Scandinavian Center for Shamanic Studies
Auto-Ethnography
Embodied Enquiry
Improvised movement

Prelude

Even as a little girl learning classical ballet, dancing was a way for me to connect and communicate with the natural world around me. I danced with flowers, trees, birds and even with the moon and the stars at night. I had no idea why I was doing this, nor did I have a particular frame of reference for it, I intuitively included them while sharing my joy of being alive. This instinctive practice started to make more sense when I was introduced to shamanic cosmologies and techniques during a three-week, course called *Soul in Nature*, at Schumacher College in Devon, UK.

During that course, I met Jonathan Horwitz, Christian de Quincey and Stephan Harding who wove together shamanism, philosophy and ecology. It opened my perception to different levels of reality and ways to engage with them. I learned how, guided by nothing but the steady rhythm of a drum and a clearly focused question, to make a journey to the spirits. I learned about the geography of the spirit

¹ Quote from Jonathan Horwitz in my workshop notes, 26 July 2012.

worlds, divided in a lower, middle and upper world. I learned how to formulate questions, ask for help, power or healing from beings in these other worlds, and how to interpret the experiences and symbols I encountered in these journeys. Most importantly, I learned to bridge the insights back into everyday reality, to integrate and live the changes that brought me back to greater alignment between body-heart-mind-spirit-soul as well as with the world around me in a fluid, dynamic relationship. Aside from practical tools, it re-established my connection to a deeply animistic experience,² in which 'nature and inanimate objects are seen as suffused with life, life force or soul' (Kieft, 2018a). It created an acknowledgement of some "energetic" quality being present in everything, a quality that 'inhabit(s) the world outside human minds' (Bailey, 2014: 74), which I spontaneously experienced as a child.

I initially attended this course "simply" as part of my search for a PhD topic, but it placed me on an ongoing and parallel trajectory of study first with the Scandinavian Center for Shamanic Studies,³ later the School of Movement Medicine,⁴ and eventually with the University of Roehampton where I did my PhD in dance anthropology (Kieft, 2013). I experience a deep-seated curiosity to learn more about the connection between nature-based practices, movement and connection to "other" layers of reality. Not surprisingly, the *Spirit Dance Workshop* with Jonathan Horwitz and Zara Waldebäck was one of the courses I attended at the Scandinavian Center for Shamanic Studies from June 24-29, 2012 in Sweden.⁵ My experiences during that course were so rich that I asked to interview Jonathan and Zara, to deepen my understanding of what had happened during the workshop, learn more about their views and understanding of "dancing with the spirits" and what the effects of such approach to dancing with the spirits might be. My workshop notes⁶ provided the foundation for the semi-structured interview,⁷ which again yielded so many interesting observations and explanations that I decided to transform it into an article to share it with a wider audience.

Absorbing the material of the interview, I realized it was too much for even one article. This first article contains building blocks that are essential to introduce this way of dancing with the spirits.⁸ First, I

² Animism is closely related to pantheism, panentheism and panspsychism. In varying degrees, each of these views recognize something immaterial in the natural world, whether it is referred to as "spirit", "the divine", "consciousness" or "mind". Another difference concerns the divine being immanent (pantheism), or both immanent *and* transcendent (panentheism). Panspsychism specifically underlines 'that everything in the universe has some form of consciousness or mind' (Larson, 2014).

³ Since its inception in 1986, the *Scandinavian Center for Shamanic Studies* has become one of the leading places to study contemporary shamanism in Europe. It is run by Jonathan Horwitz, Annette Høst, and Zara Waldebäck (<http://www.shamanism.dk/index.htm>, accessed 5 October 2018). People can choose from a range of courses, including learning basic shamanic tools, healing, counseling, soul retrieval, working with change, and shamanic views on life and death. Their way of working is based on a direct communication with spirits, rather than learned traditions from other cultures. Jonathan originally trained with Michael Harner in the USA, but has in the many years since developed his own approach and way of practice (Horwitz and Waldebäck, 2018).

⁴ The *School of Movement Medicine* was established by Ya'Acov and Susannah Darling Khan in 2007. Movement Medicine is a contemporary shamanic dance practice that provides ways to interact with self, others, the natural and spirit world and the divine through movement. It supports processes of self-discovery and realization, as well as community building and action. The practice is inspired by and builds on insights from the Darling Khan's ongoing study with various indigenous shamanic traditions across the world, their long-standing experience as teachers of Gabrielle Roth's 5Rhythms™ practice, Bert Hellinger's Family Constellations, and their work with the Pachamama Alliance and Be the Change Symposium (Darling Khan and Darling Khan, 2009, Kieft, 2013, Kieft, 2014). See also: <https://www.schoolofmovementmedicine.com>, accessed 14 January 2019.

⁵ This course has had various names over the years: *Spirit Dance Workshop*, *Shamanic Dance and Ritual*, and is currently called *Spirit Dance and Ceremony* <http://www.shamanism.dk/spiritdance.htm>, accessed 31 October 2018.

⁶ I have several journals dedicated to shamanic course work. Participants are encouraged to write down everything they remember after any exercise. In addition, through my extensive fieldwork experience, I was able to write down a lot of their teachings verbatim. Other notes I wrote from memory as soon as possible after for example an outdoor session.

⁷ The interview took place over Skype, on August 9, 2016, and was recorded and transcribed. Jonathan and Zara made some minor edits and corrections in the transcription, which subsequently served as a basis for this article. However, for the purpose of readability I made a few changes in quotes:

- (...) indicates the omission of several words or sentences;
- [text between square brackets] is my summary to avoid repetition and/or adapt a quotation more to reading language;
- in one or two cases I have changed the order of sentences to create an easier narrative to make it flow better as a text and/or introduce a specific concept step-by step for those who are unused to this language, vocabulary, or cosmology. I have indicated this in footnotes where relevant.

I sometimes combined several entries from the interview that appeared in different places. For example, Horwitz talks about the United Nations twice, which I pulled together into one quote. This too I indicated in footnotes.

⁸ Where this first article introduces shamanism, dancing with the spirits, and the concepts of power and empowerment, the next

reflect on the in-depth address of two data sources and the immersion of the researcher within her subject. Via a recognition of the invitation and challenges of “going native” in one’s research topic, through auto-ethnography, I propose a movement towards deep embodied enquiry within a trail of deep-experiencing. I then set the stage to discuss the complex concepts of shamanism, animism as a world view, the ontological reality of spirits, and the possibility of relating with other-than-human-beings. This leads to the third section on dancing with the spirits, which underlines the importance of relationship. This type of dancing has nothing to do with the way we can or cannot move our body. Instead I describe the etiquette of approaching and establishing a connection with spirit, and discuss two concrete examples of dancing with the spirit of a Tree and the spirit of the Night. These examples introduce the notions of power and empowerment, which are discussed in the fourth section, including an example of dancing with a power animal.⁹ Because this is the first of two articles that together make up one piece, there will not be the traditional conclusions or discussions, but rather an open-ended ‘Entr’Acte’, making a bridge between this piece and next.

1. Methodological Reflections: an opening of possibilities

The decision to transform a one-off interview based on my personal workshop participation into a publication had its own challenges. Aside from my eagerness to learn more, at first glance this article is based on “only” two, albeit primary, data sources (workshop notes and interview). As it was not originally intended as part of a larger research project, only in hindsight I am only trying to establish and justify research questions, methodology and argument. I could elaborate on the practice of qualitative interviewing and inflate my workshop participation into ‘participant observation’ (or ‘observing participation’ – and discuss the sliding scales and different nuances between them).

But this leads me to pause. Playing down the source-justification to only two brief moments of data-gathering does not substantiate the wealth of “tacit” experience and understanding that I acquired during my (ongoing!) investigation of shamanic practice. That tacit knowledge accumulated, amongst other things, through other workshops I did with the Scandinavian Center for Shamanic Studies,¹⁰ through my training in Movement Medicine,¹¹ and through consciously and regularly applying these combined techniques in my personal life as well as sharing them with students and clients. This longitudinal life-trail was (and is!) pursued with care, diligence, rigour and integrity. Even though it does not classify as academic research in the traditional sense of the word, it thoroughly influences my understanding of the subject. But still, can I call this trail “research” and can its insights be used as the basis of scholarly writing? This is a challenge I publically began to explore in my chapter on Soulful Scholarship (Kieft, 2018a).

As analogy, somatic practices are not generally considered a stand-alone “technique” separate from the rest of life, but instead a practice ‘that actually traverses the whole [of] (everyday) life’ (Foellmer, 2018). Can we start to contemplate research on a similar premise? Can research be recognized as a life-practice that is not confined to a specific theoretical frame, methodology or specific work space, but is infused by everything we do, including all the many ways we learn? This obviously means widening

article will focus on themes of community, performance and ceremony. I discuss ceremonial dancing as an essential and timeless, part of creating thriving human and non-human communities, as well as the difference between performance and ritual.

⁹ Some of the exercises I discuss, such as dancing or embodying your power animal are widely described in (neo-)shamanic literature (Stevens and Stevens, 1988, Vitebsky, 2001, Harner, 1980, Villoldo, 2005), while others are more specific to the Scandinavian Center for Shamanic Studies. All of these exercises can have a strongly empowering effect. If you feel called to try, please apply these techniques responsibly. Make sure you are well rooted and grounded in your body. Especially, do not proceed without knowledgeable supervision if you have a history of mental illness or experience other forms of dissociation with what most people would call “ordinary” reality.

¹⁰ Others workshops I attended include: *The Shaman’s Journey Basic Workshop* (4 times in total, of which 2 times as assistant); *Shamanic Healing; Shamanic Counseling; Shamanism Death & Life*.

¹¹ Movement Medicine was simultaneously my personal movement practice and the topic of my PhD research. I followed the first apprenticeship and professional training (2009-2011), and graduated as accredited teacher in 2015.

the definition of research to be more inclusive of 'other' personal experiences of the researcher, as well as learning more about the added value of practice.

Professor Robin Nelson recognizes the 'thread of the researcher's doing-thinking' (2013: 11) and distinguishes between personal, professional, and academic research (2013: 25), but seems to contend that only the latter establishes new insights or knowledge. Although I agree that the search for new, original contributions is indeed one of the aims of the academic endeavor, I would, in addition, underline the innovative value of other (non-academic) ways of knowing. That these are generally not acknowledged in academia is, in my view, a result of current, limited, scientific frameworks and methodological lenses (Kieft, 2018a). Addressing different ways of knowing indeed 'requires deconstructive methodologies and pedagogies that dismantle not only hegemonic power, but also the distributed and regulatory effects of power that sustain conceptions of knowledge within and across the boundaries of communities of practice' (Naccarato, 2018: 448).

Several methodologies acknowledge the porous boundaries between the professional and personal, between theory and practice. In 'a/r/tography', a hybrid, practice-based enquiry that transcends the lines between Artist, Researcher, Teacher (A/R/T) Peter Gouzouasis recognizes:

the personal perspectives of a researcher [as] inseparable from the research process. In a/r/tographic works, rather than posing problems to the process of inquiry, we revel and rejoice in the interconnectedness of our mind, body, spirit, and heart through and in our inquiries. That is because inquiry without being in tune with one's self in relation to the worlds we live in is meaningless. (Gouzouasis, 2008)

In a later publication (2013), Gouzouasis even proposes to remove the slashes – A/R/Tography becomes Artography, to acknowledge the (artificial and untenable) boundaries between knowledge, inquiry and research, and underline the holistic integration of the various roles.

Practice-as-Research is another, older and more established approach (Rust *et al.* 2007 ; Nelson 2013 ; Spatz 2015). This 'practice turn' emerged in the 1960s and favours activity and process over (fixed) structure, process and action over representation, collectiveness over individualism, and underlined reflexivity rather than self-consciousness (Kershaw, 2011: 63-4 in Naccarato, 2018). Although advocated as interdisciplinary, its focus seems to be limited to artistic practice (choreography, theatre), while ignoring other types of practice. Teoma Naccarato questions 'what is (not) practice', referring to artistic, but also to somatic, medical, legal, and spiritual practice (Naccarato, 2018: 437). Not only does she recognize research itself as a practice, one in which the 'motives and methods of the researchers are entangled with the knowledges produced' (*ibid.*: 436), more importantly she notes the trap of assuming that practice and research are independent processes,

which come into contact in ways that can be observed, or even designed. In reflecting on unfamiliar and emergent research practices with the logic of familiar and dominant methodologies, divergent expressions of knowledge remain illegible – or even invisible – within established systems of interpretation and evaluation. What might be considered practice and research "become" together, in context, and are ontologically and epistemologically bound. (Naccarato, 2018: 436)

Anthropology as a discipline has long recognized this entanglement, considering the researcher the "instrument" through which external cultural data are gathered. Participant observation for example, which was originally introduced as a method to improve observation, encourages participation in both action and behaviour (Fabian, 1983: 95). Although different degrees of closeness, belonging and insiderness have slowly become more acceptable, taking 'spiritual' realities and practices serious is still frowned upon (Marcus and Fischer, 1999 [1986], Wallis, 2003: 4, Clifford, 1988, Clifford and Marcus, 1986, Fabian, 2007). Admitting to practice any type of religion seems to cast doubt on the rationality, objectivity, and hence validity of a study.

However, auto-ethnography as a sub-discipline takes the "implication" of the researcher in their work a step further, not only by acknowledging this as a given, but through actively and systematically

extrapolating meaning from and through the researcher's personal experience to wider (cultural) contexts. Embracing subjectivity transparently allows us to understand more about the self as key fieldwork tool, and attempts to release us 'from the epistemological tension between unreflexive positivism, on the one hand, and navel gazing, on the other' (Reinharz, 1997: 18). The challenge is to transform what could be seen as mere personal inquiry, to thoroughly documented knowledge that is applicable to and useful for wider audiences, or, in other words, to move from the subjective to the intersubjective. This however still remains a relatively cognitive exercise.

I propose that embodied enquiry takes "auto-ethnography" even deeper, as the body is the place of departure and return for everything we do, including research (see also Kieft, 2017). Similarly, Indrani Margolin compares identification with external theoretical frameworks and methodologies to the exclusion of the personal, with a form of exile as a state of absence or expulsion from home: 'In a conscious effort to avoid exiling myself from my own body and to locate myself in this study, I ground my work in my own bodyself, dance and spiritual experience' (Margolin, 2014: 149).

The thorough (and very "longitudinal" – another "important" word) trail of "other" (non-academic) deep-experiencing started with dancing in nature since my early childhood, and includes my shamanic and Movement Medicine training, as well as many (solitary, shorter and longer, ceremonies of up to 3 days) that I conducted "alone" in nature. This is both so much part of who I am *and* concerns so many different layers of knowing, that trying to press it into a (academically recognized) research methodology¹² will immensely dilute and discredit it. If I *have* to give my trail of deep-experiencing an additional academic coating, I naturally gravitate toward a light-touch combination of ethnographic, heuristic, hermeneutic and phenomenological methodologies, like many other scholars who investigate perception, embodiment, movement/dance or spirituality (Hanstein, 1999, McNamara, 1999, Fraleigh, 1991, Fraleigh, 1999, Csordas, 1993, Csordas, 1999, Hefferon and Ollis, 2006, Kupperts, 2006, Sarah, 2011, Williamson, 2017). This allows empirical "evidence" and practical immersion to go hand in hand towards understanding a specific topic. Andrea Juhan for example describes how she "lives" her research question in all parts of her life, including at night during her sleep and dream states – research is not something she only engages with during specific set hours behind her research desk (Juhan, 2003: 223). Most researchers will recognize this blurring of boundaries, as we never fully switch off from our research. Insights will come up wherever we are, yet such emergence is never acknowledged as part of our "official" methodology. Is that because we cannot admit to a Eureka moment under the shower, because we cannot include our personal vulnerabilities, or because we cannot acknowledge the untidy parts of our research? Perhaps this is a result of the earlier mentioned patriarchal hegemony, in which anything of the body has been ignored, if not forgotten. The closer to the body we are, the more we know how messy life really is. This reflects on research, in which it remains a continuous struggle, to the point of physical discomfort, to smooth these parts over and present a glossy argument in an academic text. This goes much deeper than recognizing my body as an 'epistemological site of knowing' (Nabhan-Warren, 2011: 384) or a source of information (Geurts, 2002). The entirety of my experiences as a researcher-being become part of the investigation. This section introduced the other strands of emergent tacit knowledge that influence my understanding of this material, alongside the 'raw' data of workshop notes and interview, and argued for a more life-experience-inclusive research methodology.

2. Shamanism and spirits

Explaining shamans and their shamanisms is a very ambiguous task, as every nuance of every potential definition needs further contextualization and explanation to do it justice (see for example Atkinson, 1992). When investigating world-wide knowledge-systems and techniques to work with the unseen and invisible, one will come across many similarities, even though the roots of the term "shaman" refer to a very local set of practices. Largely through Mircea Eliade's seminal work on shamanism as technique of ecstasy, the Tungus word for spirit medium or priest ("saman") became descriptive of similar practices

¹² Maybe we should speak of a Mouldology instead.

around the globe (1972 [1951]). Although the word “shamanism” has been strongly integrated into most western languages, including translations to western (post-)modern versions such as neo, contemporary, urban, techno and core shamanism, originally it was an invented (western) typology used for comparison that sprouted from academic, reductionist cross-cultural research (see for example Morris, 2006: 14). Even though I personally prefer “nature-based practices” as a more inclusive/descriptive autological term with less heavy connotations, I will stick with the words shamanisms and shamans, to stay close to contemporary academic expressions and also to Jonathan and Zara’s language.

What then is ‘the type of experience held to be determinative for shamans and their communities’ (Harvey, 2003: 17)? Is it a role of ceremonial leadership, a religion or a healing practice, is it magic or performance, or all combined? Shamans have been attributed many qualities as well as deficiencies, inspired, very likely, by the personal bias of the scholar (Keeney and Keeney, forthcoming). In most descriptions however, the shaman’s job description roughly includes:

1. accessing a “spirit world” that co-exists with ordinary reality through a shift in consciousness – mostly referred to as trance (a mental, usually out-of-body state);
2. interacting with spirit beings on behalf of individuals or the community, by asking for assistance, insights and power;
3. aiming to honour, maintain or restore health and balance in individuals and community, including relationships with the social and natural world (see for example Glass-Coffin, 2010, Morris, 2006, Sylvan, 2005, Jakobsen, 1999, Harner, 1980, Gold, 1994, Keeney and Keeney, forthcoming).

Hilary and Bradford Keeney specifically draw attention to the *performance* aspects of shamanism (Keeney and Keeney, forthcoming). The ceremonial leader as show(wo)man orchestrates an experience of rapture for the actively involved “audience”, using whatever techniques, including improvisation and trickery, to facilitate transformation and re-enchantment. Even though the “roles” of traditional shamans versus workshop trained neo-shamanic practitioners differ,¹³ mobilizing the life-force towards a possibility for empowerment seems to be an essential part of their service.

Whatever the definition or role description of shamans, their work will include contact with spirit entities. Like shamans and shamanisms, spirits are equally elusive to define. The difficulty starts with *naming* them. Some people prefer the term “spirit” to other (more mystifying) alternatives, retaining the original Latin connotation ‘of breath, life, wind, awe, mystery, and invisibility’ – ‘despite the dualistic emphases of Christian Neoplatonism and Cartesian philosophy’ (Morris, 2006: 15). “Spirit” as a concept was even used by Plato and Augustine (ibid.). Others critique the word “spirits” and proposes the alternative term “other-than-human-persons” to address the diversity of beings and appearances in shamanic cosmologies (Harvey, 2003).¹⁴ In pretty much every workshop I attended with the Scandinavian Center of Shamanic Studies, someone inquires ‘what are spirits?’ I asked Jonathan and Zara again to elaborate on “spirits” and what they are made of:

Jonathan: The very first time I taught a workshop solo, somebody asked me that question: ‘what are spirits?’ So I went to my spirits, and asked them: ‘what are you?’ I was given one answer: ‘we are bundles of the energy of the universe, and we appear to people in forms that they can recognise.’ So I have been working with that, ever since. All of my experience seems to fit in with

¹³ Jonathan Horwitz is very clear on the distinction: workshop participants learn the skills of *shamanic practitioner*, while the title of *shaman* is given to people only by their community and elders, and never self-appointed. Apart from the performed roles and their acceptance/recognition within a given community, there are other differences between traditional and workshop-trained shamanisers (see for example Jakobsen, 1999). These include the occurrence of traumatic experiences such as illnesses prior to vocation, the length of apprenticeship, the accessibility and applicability of knowledge and tools (being explicit to the trained individuals or available to all), the degree to which the practice is embedded in a culture (is it part of mainstream or alternative cosmology?), and potential costs of training.

¹⁴ There is host of similar phenomenon described in various fields that we could have a look at in this context, including archetype (psychology), memes as independent and self-replicating units that transmit cultural ideas and behavioural patterns (cultural studies), morphic field resonance (biology). Earlier we also touched briefly on concepts of mind, consciousness and divinity which again show similarities.

that. (Jonathan, interview)

Zara: For me what shamanic work in essence is, is working with the more-than-human, [recognising that] everything in the world has a soul and a spirit, and (...) is alive. Of course there are many people who wonder 'am I making it up? Is it somehow an extension of my consciousness, imagination or mind?'. (Zara, interview)

These brief excerpts raise two further issues. Firstly, Jonathan explains the nature of spirits as 'bundles of energy' that appear in forms that people can recognize. It indicates that the experience of these images is coloured by the practitioner's frame of reference, and that they appear in a form that the (s)he understands. Spirits may for example refer to the deity of a local mountain (Sohei, 2011), an animal essential for the survival of the community (Ikuta, 2011), ancestors (Grau, 2015), or various goddesses including the Virgin Mary (Samuel, 2001). In other words, spirits manifest themselves differently according to context and perceiver (see also Morris, 2006: 15). We could compare this to Robert Moss' "culture-pattern dreams" that show people images that their 'cultural or religious tradition has schooled them to see,' both when they dream and when they are awake (Moss, 1996: 246). Encounters with spirits are likely to be different regarding one's philosophical or religious influences as well as geographic context. Indeed, the imagery in my own journeys,¹⁵ is strongly coloured by celtic mythology, with which I have a strong affinity. However, when I meet an archetypal teacher in spirit form, it is more often Jesus or an angel, than Buddha or a deva, simply because I grew up in the context of Christianity, not Buddhism.

This leads to the second issue. Of course I do not *literally* meet Jesus in my journeys. Does that mean that I'm making it all up, just like other participants wonder in Zara's quote above? Are spirits part of the person who experiences them, i.e. part of our inner landscape (Young, 1994: 183), or do they exist outside of us, having their own form field or ontological reality (Hume, 2007: 147)?¹⁶ Can they be both?

The four elements, which are fundamental to most shamanic approaches, can serve as a concrete example. On a scale from most concrete to more intangible and abstract, Earth, Fire, Water and Air exist as:

1. Physical manifestations *outside* of us (stone, candle flame, waterfall, gust of air)
2. Physical aspects *inside* us (bones, body temperature, bodily fluids, oxygen)
3. Metaphorical language or emotional qualities (such as feeling rooted or rock solid, on fire, floating or drowning, breezy – each Element of course has a huge variety of positive and challenging connotations)
4. Archetypal or Essential energy fields (the spirit or essence of Earth, Fire, Water, Air).

Of course the fourth one is the hardest to accept for most western-educated minds. However, when you accept the possibility of animism and you consider the candle flame as "alive" and "agentic", it is not a huge step to acknowledge that its essence has its own ontological reality too, whether or not it can actually burn us.¹⁷ Without a conclusive answer on what spirits are and how we can best name them, I acknowledge the worldwide prevalence of such phenomena, and will continue to speak of "spirits" in alignment with Jonathan and Zara's teachings, referring to those bundles of energy or essence with which we can interact as human beings.

Interaction is traditionally understood as two-way reciprocal exchange, through for example gesture or communication. How can we interact with beings who do not necessarily have physical agency or cognition? Perhaps we can widen our understanding of 'interaction', to include a shift in perspective, inspired by Rane Willerslev:

¹⁵ I've done well over 160 journeys in 'traditional' (lying down) sense, not counting the shamanic outdoor meditations, nor the dance journeys either on my own or with Movement Medicine.

¹⁶ Naturally this challenges the Western (Cartesian) concept of reality: I think therefore I am, a view which limits the concept of cognition to human beings only. What happens to the premise of ontological subjectivity if we 'acknowledge that there is "more" than only us?' (Foellmer, 2018). And does this deeply ingrained framework even allow for such a question?

¹⁷ I would even argue that the intangible manifestations (#4), can exist *without* their physical counterparts – not everything in this world exist in-form, but that is beyond the scope of this article.

Among the Yukaghirs (...) persons can take a variety of forms, of which a human being is only one. They can also appear in the shape of rivers, trees, souls, and spirits, but above all it is mammals that Yukaghirs see as “other-than-human persons” (Hallowell 1960: 36, in Willerslev). Moreover, humans and animals can move in and out of different species’ perspectives by temporarily taking on each other’s bodies. Indeed, (...) this capacity to take on the appearance and view-point of another being is one of the key aspects of being a person. (Willerslev, 2007: 2)

The description of such moving in and out of different perspectives, is literally appropriate for our investigation of dancing with spirit. One of the characteristics of dance, after all, is that of a ‘relationship-while-moving’, a relationship by means of physical, rather than verbal, articulation (Kieft, 2013).

3. Dancing with the spirits

Again, there are probably as many conceptions of dance, as there are of shamans, shamanism and spirits. In my work I usually refer to dance as ‘conscious, improvised movement’, a meditation in motion, in which

the body becomes an instrument for awareness and communicating with self and surroundings. No specific training is required, as it can concern everyday movements and gestures, such as walking, stretching, turning, rolling, when done with full attention. This type of movement does not aim for aesthetics or ‘bringing a message across’ to an audience. It is rather a means for personal exploration in a different way. (Kieft, 2018a)

This bears some similarities with Steve Paxton’s *Small Dance*, which recognizes something as still as standing as ‘a chance to observe systems in the body’ (in Nelson, 2015: 38). The standing person can pick up subtleties in a nuanced way, and ‘get faster at perceiving and understanding what’s going on’, observing ‘events that the consciousness is not causing’ (ibid. 39). Zara indeed explains that this type of shamanic dancing

has nothing to do with moving your legs. It may be incredible small movements that might not be seen as dance (...). So this is not really about following a particular kind of form. It is about using movement in another way to come into connection, and allow that to move you. It is not about what anybody else sees. It is about how you feel in relation to what you are dancing with. (Zara, interview)

Coming into relationship, into connection is what matters, and ‘all that is required to be “dancing” is a shift of perception, an opening of the senses, a conscious awakening to the present moment within a specific context’ (Kieft, 2017). Regardless of whether a dance is a private or public event, the dancer naturally exists in a network of relationships, with self, with earth and sky, with culture and environment. However, consciously contacting a spirit being is a two-way interaction.

During a “normal” journey to the spirits we usually lay down, and visit the spirits in their world (which is non-ordinary reality for us), to ask for teachings, guidance, insight, help or power. *Dancing* is an additional way of connecting with spirit, and is similarly about building a relationship with them too, but this time we invite the spirits into our world, into our bodies, or close by (workshop notes, 26 July 2012).¹⁸ There are many ways to do this. Below I will unpack two experiences, dancing with the spirit of a Tree, and dancing with the spirit of Night.

¹⁸ Some shamans are known as dancers or as singers; those modalities become their way to change their consciousness and work with the spirits (workshop notes, 26 July 2012). Indeed ‘for some people, the *only* way that they get in contact with the spirits is through dancing. That is how they do it, also traditionally.’ (Jonathan, Interview)

Dancing with the Spirit of a Tree

One of the invitations in the *Spirit Dance Workshop*, is to dance with (the spirit essence of) a Tree. It can be a tree you have seen on the workshop grounds, or one you had a prior relationship with, for example a tree in your garden, or one you used to play in when you were a child. Connection is a two-way process, so you ask the tree like you would a human being: “will you dance with me?” And the tree may say “yes”, or it may say “no”. (Zara, interview). You proceed only if the tree says “yes”. Asking permission is

really basic to all kinds of shamanic work. We don’t just go and take what we want, neither physically in the material world, nor in the spirit world. [This] feels really important for the dynamic of the dance. Again it is about the stepping out of myself and stepping into a relationship. (Zara, interview)

This might (again) be one of the moments where our strong (Western) cognitive training kicks in. ‘Surely the tree can’t think, can’t speak, how can it possibly answer with ‘yes’ or ‘no’? Indeed, am I making this up?’ This asks for a physical and energetic literacy, that allows us to pick up clues other than a spoken word (see also Kieft, 2018a). A response might come through physical sensations (such as heat, or tingling), feelings (sense of calmness, anxiety, joy, or eagerness), but can also come in an external way, through a rustling of the tree’s leaves, a sudden bird call, or a screaming siren. When we pay attention, there are many things that symbolically “speak” to us. It is important that it is

not a drama exercise where you are trying to *be* the tree, but it is really allowing the spirit to move you. You are not trying to do anything, you’re just standing there and trying to feel it and open to it and allowing it to move you and through that, you come into connection with it. This is a really easy thing you can do and you don’t even have to think of it as a spirit dance, you are just dancing with the force of life, the force of nature, and come into connection and communication. (Zara, interview)

Because trees have roots, the Tree dance is usually done on the spot. This is an excerpt of my experience in Sweden on the 2012 course:

When we start the exploration, I remember the enormous Plane Tree at Schumacher College, UK, where I first started working with Jonathan. Plane was the first non-human being I had a conscious “conversation” with. Now it feels as if that specific tree is calling me again.

Connecting to that specific Plane through my imagination, with my eyes closed, I realize that physical distance does not make a difference to this exploration. I have a strong visceral memory of seeing this majestic Tree, from afar and close up, its trunk, tall, strong, robust and unyielding while moving gracefully to the breeze, and the fresh young leaves playing lightly on the branches touched by the wind. I remember the feeling of my cheek against its bark.

With its slightly tilted trunk not diminishing its power of being, it tells me I don’t always have to stand up straight to be ‘me’. Moss brings its own uniqueness and beauty, although at first I’m annoyed by it apparently disrupting the pattern of the bark. Tree and moss teach me that together they contribute to wholeness and perfection, respectful towards other existences. Without these nuances, life would become clinical, predictable, and boring. No intention to harm. No exclusion.

The tree stretches through time and space, to places I cannot see. Countless invisible lines connected to the universe, to eternity, to the cycles of life. Life cannot exist without death, light not without darkness, day not without night. My arms reach open wide, embracing these connections.

Past and Present, Here and There, Tree and Me become one. I connect to its life force, sap moving through my trunk. I feel my roots grow deep into the dark earth, and leaves sprout from my finger tips. A fierce sense of joy and vitality erupts in me, for being here, for life. Small animals crawl on my skin, a bird builds her home in my arms. Welcome. At home in several worlds, I smile. (workshop notes, 25 July 2012)

Since my first immersion into shamanic ways of experiencing the world, I have been intrigued by exploring 1) where exactly these insights comes from, and 2) how we, as humans, are able to receive such information. Jonathan and Zara acknowledge that these are indeed huge topics, but rather than having to define either the nature of the phenomena or our connection with them, they keep stressing the *experience of relationship*:

We see that, through the power of focus and intention, we create a relationship with something specific, in this case a specific tree that is a physical entity, but also has a spiritual essence. Then we try to contact it in the spiritual dimension that is the non-material, and move within that dimension. So we are dancing with a particular entity and the key thing for me in that is the relationship. (Zara, interview)

Experiences such as these, whether or not we can explain their origin and nature, often answer questions, lead to personal teachings, and contribute to a more empowered way of living life. They offer a creative and generative space, in which new meaning can be sought, found and created (Grau, 1999: 165, see also Brinson, 1985: 211), which is important, not only for the individual, but for the strength of the community as well.

Dancing with the Spirit of Day and Night

It may be one thing to relate to a concrete tree, but we can also dance with the spirit of a 'concept' or more abstract phenomenon. Jonathan and Zara offer something which they call the 'Pair Dance' (also on many of their other courses). The Pair Dance can be applied to any pair of inseparable halves of a whole, which always exist in relationship to each other, such as dark/light, peace/power, endings/beginnings, life/death. During this workshop, we danced with the pair of day/night. We partnered up with another person and chose who would dance which part. It is essential that in each pair, both halves of the whole exist, as the purpose of the pair dance is to explore and attain felt knowledge about how the two exist in relationship to each other; what the balance and dance between them is: 'Usually this dance is seen as very simple, but nearly always has a great effect beyond the dancer's expectations and mental assumptions' (Horwitz and Waldebäck, 2018). There were five different stages in the exercise: 1) you dance separately without paying attention to your partner; 2) you dance while becoming aware of your partner from a distance; 3) you dance together; 4) move apart from each other while still being aware; and 5) finally dance by yourself again. We were instructed not to physically touch each other, as the spiritual exchange of energies is powerful. We danced through several 24-hour cycles. I asked the Spirit of Night, to dance me, to move me:

I feel her enter, like a magnificent black panther. Lithe. Strong. Big. My movements become very sensual, and earthly. I experience a sense of safe feminine, of holding and comfort, like a velvet mother. This feels the strongest during the early night. Towards the morning my movements become stiffer and colder, longing for warmth. While the day gives me warmth, I become less substantial. Coming dusk my essence gathers again, I become more dense and defined. The strong sensual feeling returns, yet with a different flavour than 'the night before'.

I realise that as the Spirit of Night, I am different each time, due to many aspects, clouds, moon, temperature, moist. I have many faces but I am the place of retreat, the womb space, the

dreaming space. The space of replenishment and recharge. The darkness in which new seeds germinate. But although I 'thin', I do not cease to exist when Day comes.

I learn that a specific "quality" (place of retreat) can manifest in different ways; and that nothing is ever static just because we happen to label it with the same word. On a very practical level, this experience helps me to accept that it is okay that my sleep is different every night, and that I do not need to panic if there are periods with different sleep and dreaming patterns, allowing for a greater flexibility regarding our western preoccupation with 'having a good night's sleep'. (workshop notes, 26 July 2012)

After the dance, we shared our experience, first with our partner, then in the larger group. My partner, who had danced the Spirit of Day, really felt we were a pair. She had been hunting for food, providing shelter and giving that to the night when she was hungry and cold. Other participants spoke of a love affair between day and night, between light and dark. These belong together, even though they spend most of their lives apart, they are in unity. Some experienced how very much alive the night is. Others spoke about the quality of inclusion or exclusion, of value or valuelessness: what is it that we value or emphasize? Deepening the understanding of the quality you were dancing, seemed to open the door to compassion (workshop notes, 26 July 2012).

Personally I have a very comfortable relationship with Night, and I enjoyed the opportunity to dancing with this spirit. I wondered how this exercise would be for someone who has a difficult relationship with one of the pair's aspects. In what ways would our prior sentiments regarding a concept colour what we receive during such a dance?

Jonathan: You are only looking at half the dance. And in fact, the whole thing is about the *pair*. And you are dancing *part* of the pair. You were dancing 'Night'. So we ask people to choose what they want to dance, Day or Night. And it is very, very interesting, because some people choose the one they have the difficult relationship with. People who are afraid of the dark might very well choose to dance with Night. On the other hand, they might say 'no way I'm going to dance with Night, I'm going to dance with Day, because I love the day from sunrise to sunset, I'm just flying'. That's fine, if that is what they want to dance. And what the whole dance is about is, what happens when you realise and experience that these two halves are not separate, but part of a whole. (...) So many times, they are changed by this dance. People who were afraid of the dark, who said 'no way I'm going to dance Dark, I'm going to dance Light', and afterwards darkness just opens their arms and they fall into the embrace. It is a very magical moment. (Jonathan, interview)

Even though the person is initially dancing with one part of the whole, the other part is irrevocably connected to it. And of course, as Zara says: 'the human dancer is part of the equation. It's not just about the essence of Day or the essence of Night coming through, but that will always be mediated by that body, by that person who is receiving it, specifically because they are asking for personal teachings' (Zara, interview).

Indeed, I felt like a human tree, with feet as roots, and arms as branches, and I understood Night through my woman's body. Some people will criticize antropomorphizing these experiences as describing a non-human entity in human terms.¹⁹ But as Zara said, for me this emerges from a simple recognition that it is through *this* human body that *my* understanding happens, not from a sense of human superiority. It is relating to another existence, whether it be animate or inanimate, through the physical matter of my being, which, at this time, happens to be a human form. When we work through consciousness rather than cognition, they physical form is, in a way, no longer 'limiting' our potential observations. I hesitate to say this, because I do not want to imply that 'we' can do this without a body. Of course not, as humans we naturally *have* a body, and therefore any experience will always be mediated

¹⁹ Zara elaborates over email: 'It is worth making the distinction between "animism" and "anthropomorphism" and that they are in fact not the same. We are not making the Spirit into a human, but we are seeing it as alive...' (Horwitz and Waldebäck, 2018).

through our sensations and emotions. After one morning with Goethean inquiry into the ‘whole and part’ of a stone, followed by a shamanic journey to the spirit essence of that Stone,²⁰ it took me thirty minutes to be able to walk again. The experience of being ‘stoned’ (indeed, without mind-altering substances), left me unable to use my legs. Later I learned that this might be similar to the paralysis that happens in our dreaming states every night (Morley, 2013). I use this example to show that indeed, despite this mediation-through-our-human-form, this type of dancing ‘has nothing to do with moving your legs.’ (Zara, interview) Aside from actual, physical, literal dancing (whatever our skills, however it looks), we can establish the dance-connection through our consciousness, or spirit essence, too. Jonathan recalls the story of a woman who had lost the use of her legs. She

learned how to journey to the spirit world. And (...) she came back [from her journey], and was so happy, because she could dance again (...) in the spirit world. So learning how to journey helped her to make a shift in consciousness (...). This is a very wonderful way to work with people who have become physically impaired.’ (Jonathan, interview)

This provides a radical example of personal empowerment, in which someone becomes strong enough to accept and surrender to a physical impairment, while continuing to learn (see also Ya’Acov Darling Khan interview 23.06.11 in Kieft 2013). In the next section I will unpack the concept of “power,” which is one of the central concepts within shamanic work.

4. Power and Empowerment

Shamanic practices work with power places, power songs, and power animals (Villoldo and Jendresen, 1995 [1990], Harner, 1980, Stevens and Stevens, 1988). As many people are uncomfortable with the word “power”, I ask Jonathan and Zara to give a bit more context to this.

Jonathan: The word power has this connotation in English, of being something that scares people. That’s because many people do not feel powerful, and they feel that there are other forces that are much more powerful, for example the bank that holds their mortgage, or the government that they do not agree with, or, if they live in some troubled part of the world, the invading army at the border. From the shaman’s point of view, we talk about two different kinds of power. There is the controlling power, or power over; and then the other kind is lifting power, the empowering power, which is more like energy. In Scandinavia we talk about ‘Kraft’ and ‘Makt’. So I encourage people to, rather than try and control situations, to empower themselves so that they can step into a situation and read the situation in a power-filled way, so that they can dance with the situation. (Jonathan, interview)

Power is often equated with control, anger, aggression, violence, and abuse, and has therefore become somewhat of a dirty connotation, especially in New Age circles. Being an unpleasant notion, this topic is often avoided. Consequently, it is likely to burst out from the shadows of the unspoken in an uncontrolled and indeed potentially dangerous way, confirming the belief that power is indeed something scary and easily abused. This would be one of the translations of “Makt” as “Might” – (Might of the State, of institutions, etc.), which indeed has the connotation of “power over”. Concepts such as power, agency and autonomy have been discussed by modern philosophers such as Nietzsche and Foucault, whose work in turn has been criticized by feminist scholars. Foucault for example discussed the effects of power on bodies, as well as also the intertwinement of power and resistance – power never existing on its own (Deveaux, 1994). Language plays an important role in the perpetuation of power, as words can be used to affirm or undermine something or someone. Indeed, ‘agency does not begin and end with the speaker, [but] is complicit with the forces it opposes’ (Disch, 1999: 556 discussing the work of Judith Butler). Judith

²⁰ This was during the aforementioned workshop Soul in Nature, in 2005, at Schumacher College, UK.

Butler calls for the development of (political) communities that can generate and accommodate a generous sense of identity in individuals, one that embraces differences rather than eradicates them (Butler, 1994: 140).²¹

However, as long as power is one-sidedly associated with something dangerous and destructive, many people remain afraid to step into their own personal power. Out of fear of hurting something or someone, we choose to ignore this force: being 'weak' seems a safer option than doing harm. Perhaps the fear of "Makt" leads to the disappearance of "Kraft" in terms of skill, of being empowered, being in your strength. But what if we widen our understanding of the concept of power, to include a view on power simply as 'energy'?

Zara: For me Kraft and Makt are not really different. What makes them different is how we relate to and use them. You could say 'power', 'life force', 'energy', any of these things that makes things flow. And how do we use that power? Do we use it to control, or do we use it as life fuel?

Eline: Like electricity can be used for very many different purposes.

Zara: Exactly. Sometimes when we use the word 'energy', it can seem a little flakey, maybe, in some circles, but really, in today's modern European world, we are surrounded by energy all the time. Our lives are built on this concept of energy in the form of electricity that is mostly invisible. Yet it is a very basic and essential concept to our life. If we did not have energy in the form of electricity, most modern European life would come to a standstill. So I invite people to see the word 'energy' in its bigger context and maybe think of it as life fuel, with many aspects to it. It is not just an abstract, vague New Age idea. (Zara, interview)

Shifting this view of how we look at power, and how we choose or refuse to use it, will not happen overnight. In traditional shamanic apprenticeships it often takes thirty years to learn how to work with power. Power, as 'the currency of the shaman' (Zara, interview), needs to be yielded responsibly, not unlike applying electricity in appropriate ways.²² This responsible/appropriate application of power aims to strengthen life-force through concentrating order, information and harmony, an aim that can be further amplified in dance as suitable vehicle to move and enhance the life-force, both through pre-defined forms as well as through improvisation (Kieft, 2018b).

In most basic shamanic workshops and instruction books, one of the first journeys is to find your power animal, and learn to work with it (Lüttichau, 2009, Harner, 1980). Embodying, or "dancing" your power animal is often recommended as a way to strengthen the relationship, and receive and integrate its primal energy into your life (Stevens and Stevens, 1988). It is not simply the joy of discovering more about the animal kingdom through an embodied exploration – the key lies in *integrating* this in our daily lives as an asset towards empowerment. Jonathan underlines that:

the purpose of this dance is not to *escape* the world, but to help shape it for the people we live with,²³ by bringing this power or life force into conscious awareness. Maybe your head is in the clouds, but your feet are firmly planted on the ground. Shamans are very disciplined. Being grounded and being able to fly are not mutually exclusive'. (workshop notes, 26 July 2012)

Dancing with your power animal

Conscious dance practices such as 5Rhythms (Roth and Loudon, 1990 [1989]) and Movement Medicine (Darling Khan and Darling Khan, 2009) often invite participants to imagine moving in the body of an

²¹ I will elaborate on this in the other article on community, performance and ceremony.

²² Although most shamanic approaches emphasize maintaining or restoring balance and harmony, the same techniques could be applied in to disrupt conceptual, psychic and social order (Atkinson, 1992), crossing over into the territory of sorcery and black magic. In the light of earlier mentioned observations of feminist scholars, power would not only be seen as the currency of the shaman, (or indeed a doctor, a priest, or a notary), but as something created in interaction between the specialist and the community. However, this debate might shift significantly if we look at power as 'life-force', and it would be interesting to investigate the work of these philosophers from a shamanic perspective, which, unfortunately is beyond the scope of this article.

²³ Again emphasizing the importance of community, which will be the focus of the other article based on this interview.

animal: how would it be to move on soft paws, or if a tail would be sprouting from your sacrum? Such explorations shift posture and expand a person's movement range. Dancing *with* an animal as dance partner brings this to another level. You can ask it various questions such as 'please show me how to dance', or 'please teach me your dance'. You can even invite it to dance you.²⁴ Whatever the invitation, it will contribute to a better understanding of this being and what it might teach you ('moving with' is different to 'reading about' your power animal). Just like the tree, in the above section, taught and showed me so much, in this particular exercise:

I invited my power animal to dance me, offering my dancer's body up to her. My movements changed entirely. I dropped onto all fours. My sense of smell increased. I was hunting on soft paws, silent as a shadow. I stalked and killed my prey by pouncing on and going for the soft exposed neck. I tore it up and ate the warm meat raw, dripping with blood. The commentator voice in my head was slightly concerned at this point. Although I was no longer a vegetarian at the time, it taught me about vulnerability and humility. Then I returned to my animal family, and rested, digesting this life-giving food. The energy changed, we played and teased each other. There was a sense of care, humour, and playfulness and my dance became strong, wild, joyful, and full of energy! A true celebration of life. In my dance, I returned to being human, and gave thanks for all her support. (workshop notes, 26 July 2012)

This experience gave me a corporeal sense of elevated energy levels for a good 24 hours afterwards. I repeat this exercise often, usually to ask for a different angle on a specific situation, in addition to my limited human perspective. My frame of reference becomes very different when I move with wings, night vision, with a skin to shed, or while being aquadynamic. The ability to learn from the 'other-than-human' perspectives (Willerslev, 2007) is open to anyone, regardless of cultural tradition or training.

Entr'Acte

My thesis includes an overview of twelve reasons or motivations 'why people dance' (Kieft, 2013). These include 1) evolutionary instincts and biological needs, 2) emotional outlet and release, 3) psychological and intellectual understanding and self-expression, 4) accessing a special kind of knowledge, 5) social recreation, 6) aesthetics, or reflection of aesthetic values, 7) religious and quasi-religious activity, 8) creating, reproducing and maintaining identities of self and group, 9) reflection, validation and maintenance of social organisation, ideologies and worldviews, 10) healing, change and transformation, 11) reflection of economic subsistence patterns or economic activity itself, 12) political engagement and action.²⁵

These reasons are all relevant to the way of dancing with the spirits as taught by Jonathan and Zara.²⁶ Like many indigenous dances, it provides a container where change can be absorbed and integrated (Katz et al 1999 in Low 2015: 33). In this article we looked at definitions and expressions of shamanism, animism and the spirits, and how we can relate to these other beings through dance. This in turn raised questions regarding the type of dancing that does not require agile bodies but indeed can take place in the subtle realms of our consciousness. I discussed several concrete examples of dancing with the spirit of a tree, of the night, and of a power animal, leading to a different understanding of working with power and empowerment.

²⁴ The process of shape shifting is fundamental to shamanic practices (see for example Eliade, 1972 [1951]: 459-61) and also often discussed in archeological texts on rock art and cave paintings, discussing figures that are part human part animal (Guenther, 2015). Keeney and Keeney write about this practice: "The shaman does not literally become an animal or occupy the materiality of another body; it is the shaman's heart, via song, that becomes inseparable from the other" (Keeney and Keeney, forthcoming).

²⁵ For this summary I drew on the work of Blacking (1985), Ehrenreich (2007), Grau (1993: 23, 1999: 165), Henry et al. (2000: 256), Ikuta (2011), Peterson Royce (2002: 79-83), Spencer (1985), Thomas (2003: 79) and Williams (2004: 5-7). While finishing my thesis, Kimerer LaMothe's work with the same title *Why we dance* had not yet been published (Lamothe, 2015).

²⁶ Perhaps with the exception of dance as economic activity, except for the workshop being an economic activity itself, of course.

These are only a few possibilities of dancing with the spirit world, and indeed it feels as if, despite the length of this piece, more remains unspoken than spoken. The follow up article will introduce shamanic dance as a communal ceremony to invite power, connection and understanding, beyond dance as leisure activity. Zara explains community as 'coming into one with, with unity' (Zara, interview), which includes human and non-human communities. This in turn raises interesting questions regarding the roles and contributions of "performers" and "audience", and the difference between performance and ceremony. For now, it is time to give thanks.

After any journey, danced or otherwise (lying down while journeying with the drum, medicine walk, vision quest), students are taught to give thanks to the spirits, and ask what they can do in return. Interestingly, Zara says that very often 'the spirits will say "dance, in one form or another".' (Zara, interview) Jonathan adds:

Jonathan: Yes, and it's really funny, because then [people] get angry, and say: "listen, I asked you a *serious* question, and you just tell me to dance!" And they come back after the journey and they complain in the circle, and I just start to laugh, "hey, dancing *is* serious stuff, if they want you to dance, dance!"

This was exactly what Gaia, the spirit of the Earth mother, told me during my first workshop, bouncing across Dartmoor: 'keep dancing with spirit.' And where the journey took me since... So I leave here with a combined invitation from Jonathan and Zara, and hope that this article has inspired curiosity to experience:

One of the most beautiful things that you can easily do is to stand outside in nature and feel the breeze, the air around you, and then just move with the air and the wind and feel how you are moving with the wind, how it is moving you, how it's moving through you, how your breath is moving with the wind. This is a very simple exercise in opening us up to the world and to dancing with something outside of ourselves that isn't just about me expressing myself. [For a while,] *stop thinking* and just experience without analysing the experience. Just experience what it's like to move with the wind, like a tree does. Just experience... (Zara & Jonathan, interview)²⁷

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²⁷ This invitation combines quotes from both Zara and Jonathan.

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