

# Participation and Spirit: An Interview with Jorge N. Ferrer

## Espiritualidad Participativa: Una entrevista con Jorge Ferrer

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### Abstract

This interview with Jorge Ferrer explores a wide number of themes, ranging from his psychology studies at the University of Barcelona and the roots of his interest in transpersonal psychology to his arrival to San Francisco and first years at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) as a doctoral student. Topics discussed include his dissertation research, the publication of his first book *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory* (SUNY Press, 2002), the participatory turn in transpersonal psychology, his first publications in the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* and debate with Ken Wilber, and the development of the participatory paradigm in more recent years. Finally, Ferrer highlights what he considers to be the main issues and debates within transpersonal psychology, as well as shares his main current interests and future projects.

**Key words:** transpersonal psychology, participatory turn, perennial philosophy, participatory paradigm, Jorge Ferrer

### Resumen

Esta entrevista con Jorge Ferrer explora un amplio abanico de temas, comenzando por sus estudios de licenciatura en psicología en la Universidad de Barcelona, las raíces de su interés por la psicología transpersonal, su llegada a San Francisco y sus primeros años en el CIIS y la “Bay Area” como estudiante de doctorado. Los temas tratados incluyen su trabajo de tesis, la publicación de su primer libro *Espiritualidad creativa*, el “giro participativo” dentro de la psicología transpersonal, sus primeras publicaciones en el *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* y su debate con Ken Wilber, así como el desarrollo del paradigma participativo a lo largo de los últimos años. Finalmente, Ferrer destaca cuales considera que son los principales asuntos y debates en el campo de la psicología transpersonal actualmente, sus intereses principales y sus proyectos futuros.

**Palabras clave:** psicología transpersonal, giro participativo, filosofía perenne, paradigma participativo, Jorge Ferrer

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**IP: How and when did you become interested in transpersonal psychology? How and where did you find it in the Barcelona of the 1980s?**

**JF:** The roots of my interest in transpersonal psychology are deeply personal. Let me explain: I experienced spontaneous trances or states of absorption in my childhood (at times in the classroom!), out-of-body experiences throughout my pre-adolescence, and some deep mystical states via psychedelics in my last year of high school. In addition, by my seventeenth birthday I had become aware of a number of energetic blocks in my body and associated psychological neurotic patterns. These non-ordinary experiences, as well as the awareness of psychological wounds, pushed me to search for understanding and healing through the study of psychology at the University of Barcelona (1986-1991). Needless to say, mainstream psychology, which was already dominated by cognitivist and neuroscientific approaches, provided neither answers to my questions nor healing to my wounds.

By the second year of my psychology degree, I launched a personal search through autodidactic study. My natural inclination for deep (i.e., beneath the surface) explanations drew me to psychoanalysis: I first read most of Freud's *Collected Works* and from there I went on to read Jung and Fromm. Reading Fromm, Suzuki, and de Martino's (1970) *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* was a turning point in my quest. That was my first contact with Eastern philosophies (where I found non-pathological accounts of my non-ordinary experiences), which in turn led me to Alan Watts, Abraham Maslow, humanistic psychology, and eventually to transpersonal psychology.

At that time, I also started practicing meditation regularly, first with a Hindu group called Brahma Kumaris and then with a Korean Zen teacher. During this period, I experimented combining psychedelics and meditation and also began to attend psychotherapy. Two pivotal events happened: first, my encounter with the psychologist Octavio Garcia, who was teaching transpersonal psychology in a local yoga center in Barcelona. Meeting Octavio was hugely important for me. He was not only the first clinical psychologist interested in transpersonal psychology I had ever met, but also a serious spiritual practitioner who clearly walked his talk. The second was meeting Ramon V. Albareda and Marina T. Romero, co creators of Holistic Sexuality—an innovative body of work that, despite its name, is actually a powerful transpersonal approach to integral transformation (see Ferrer, 2003). Involvement in this work provided me with not only deep personal healing, but also essential experiential seeds for my future participatory approach to spiritual growth.

Coming back to your question, I still remember the relief and exhilaration I felt when I came across the Spanish translation of Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan's (1981) *Beyond Ego: Transpersonal Dimensions in Psychology* (*Más allá del ego*, published by Ed. Kairos) at the university's library. In this book I found, finally, a school of psychology concerned with not only the study of non-ordinary states of consciousness, but also integral healing and development. I eventually subscribed to *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, and, since most of the transpersonal literature was in English language, I spent countless hours translating transpersonal articles into Spanish both for my study and with the intention of improving my English skills. By then I had learnt that most transpersonal scholars and institutions were located in California and dreams of travelling there one day to obtain a graduate degree in transpersonal psychology began to arise in my mind. My original goal was to bring what I would learn in California back to the University of Barcelona so that future students would be able to find there such integrative perspective. My family did not have money to fund my studies, so many years passed before I was able to realize my California dream. It was not until 1993 that "la Caixa" Cultural Foundation granted me a Fellowship to study in the East-West Psychology doctoral program at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), San Francisco.

**IK: You studied psychology in Barcelona and started doing a Ph.D. there. How was your experience at the University in Barcelona? How was transpersonal psychology seen in the academia in Barcelona? After more than 20 years living in San Francisco, do you see changes when you came back to Barcelona?**

**JF:** My psychology studies at the University of Barcelona were disappointing, to say the least. Although I performed well academically, my heart was not involved. As said, I was looking for deep psychological healing and understanding, and psychology at the university was dominated by cognitivist and biological approaches that were mostly interested in empirical evidence and reductionist explanations. (This is, by the way, why even though I strongly support scientific studies of transpersonal psychology and the mission of this Journal, I feel uneasy about the emerging scientism in the field; I would not want transpersonal psychology to become a subfield within the Psychology of Religion or the Scientific Study of Religion). To complement my studies, I created my own extra-curriculum with subjects ranging from depth psychology to shamanism to Eastern philosophy, and from consciousness studies to meditation research to humanistic and transpersonal psychologies. In addition, together with other psychology students, I launched a study group called The Beagle (named after Darwin's famous ship) to explore alternative psycholog-

ical approaches and techniques (gestalt, psycho-drama, meditation, etc.) and support special events at the University with local humanistic psychologists. It was in the context of this group that I taught my first course in transpersonal psychology, but otherwise I felt rather isolated during those years insofar as my real academic interests.

In the late 1980s, very few people at the University knew about transpersonal psychology. A couple of professors knew about its existence but considered it a California fad that did not belong to the province of the scientific psychology we were studying. In my classes, I often brought transpersonal considerations to discussions; for example, in a psychopathology course I problematized the pathological nature of the so-called “depersonalization syndrome” from a Buddhist perspective. In most cases, such views were politely acknowledged due to either genuine or politically correct cross-cultural respect, but quickly disregarded as folk understandings in need of scientific validation.

After gaining my clinical psychology degree (whose last year I attended at the Univ. Wales College of Cardiff, United Kingdom, thanks to an ERASMUS Scholarship), in the early 1990s I conducted doctoral scientific research at University of Barcelona’s Department of Psychiatry and Clinical Psychobiology on the “Electrophysiological and Hemispheric After-Effects of Mindfulness Meditation,” with the support of a Doctoral Research Training Fellowship (FPI) granted by the Catalonian Council. Paradoxically, only the most biologically oriented department at the University allowed me to study something close to my interests, in this case the long-term effects of Soto Zen meditation practice on the level of alertness, as measured by brain evoked potentials and hemispheric tasks. Most scholars at the department regarded the assertions of depth psychology as “fairy tales” (and I had to stay mostly in the closet about my transpersonal interests), but the laboratory director’s early experiences with Transcendental Meditation (TM) encouraged him to support my research project. I completed the empirical part of the research but never defended the dissertation; while in the midst of the data analysis, I received a “la Caixa” Fellowship and moved to California in pursuit of my dreams.

In my dealings with “la Caixa” Cultural Foundation, I should add, I could not be fully transparent either about my transpersonal goals. It was clear that transpersonal talk would not take me very far with their academically mainstream selection committee, but lying was not an option so I was placed in a difficult dilemma. The answer, I realized, was to talk about my interests in scientific terms (my scientific training finally paid off!): instead of “meditation”, for example, I spoke of an “alertness self-regulation technique”, and “altered states of consciousness” became “modes of brain information processing”—and the stratagem worked.

Insofar as my transpersonal interests, then, the university years were rather solitary times. This is why I have felt so excited to witness the increasing interest in transpersonal psychology in Spain over the last two decades. Even though transpersonal psychology has not made it (for the time being?) into mainstream university curricula, there are several professional transpersonal associations, a Master degree is in preparation, and many people know today about the field. The facts that the editor of this Journal is a Spaniard, and that the author of this interview just defended a transpersonal doctoral research at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, bear witness to this growing academic interest.

**IP: When did you arrive to San Francisco? What did you find there in relation to transpersonal psychology? How was your experience during those first years at CIIS and in the Bay Area of San Francisco?**

**JF:** I arrived to San Francisco and CIIS in the summer of 1993. It was, literally, a dream coming true. At that time, CIIS was a much smaller institution, a rare blend of graduate university and spiritual *sangha*, located in the still quite hippie Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco where I lived for some time. After considering several options, I decided to pursue my doctoral degree in the department of East-West Psychology, which not only integrated academic study and psycho-spiritual transformation, but also offered the larger number of transpersonal courses at the Institute.

To my pleasant surprise, that same year two transpersonal scholars who would become greatly influential for me began teaching at the Institute: Stanislov Grof and Richard Tarnas. At CIIS, I had the privilege to study with Grof in a doctoral seminar format involving only a few other students. Because “la Caixa” Fellowship granted unlimited funds for two years of study, and thanks to the degree’s curricular flexibility, I could do most of the Grof Holotropic Breathwork training as part of my doctoral studies. Studying with Grof, one of the founders of transpersonal psychology, was another dream coming true and I will always consider him a midwife of my experiential entry into transpersonal realities. However, it was ultimately Tarnas who turned out to be my most significant intellectual/spiritual mentor. Tarnas’s participatory epistemology, outlined in his masterful *The Passion of the Western Mind* (1991), was crucial for the development of my transpersonal participatory approach. He eventually became a member of my doctoral committee (together with Lawrence Spiro and Michael Washburn) and kindly accepted to write the foreword to my first book, *Revisoning Transpersonal Theory* (2002) (published in Spanish by Ed. Kairos as *Espiritualidad Creativa*). There were many other influences at the Institute but I should at least also mention Vernice Solimar, whose inspiring lectures in transper-

sonal psychology influenced my pedagogical approach, and Jürgen Kremer, whose approach to indigenous studies and participatory knowing also impacted my transpersonal thinking.

As should be obvious, I owe a profound debt of gratitude to “la Caixa” Foundation because it allowed me to focus two years of my life on my transpersonal studies and explorations without having to worry about making a living in the expensive Bay Area of San Francisco. During my student years at CIIS, I continued individual and group psychotherapy, immersed myself in meditation practices such as Vipassana at Spirit Rock center, worked with Mexican mushrooms and ayahuasca, and studied with Joan Halifax, whose teachings combined Zen Buddhism and shamanism. At that time, Joan taught at CIIS; I also traveled to New Mexico to do a vision quest under her guidance, which became an important rite of passage into my adulthood. Later on, I connected with Donald Rothberg and was member of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship’s (BPF) Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement (BASE) for some years, integrating meditation retreats and volunteering service with homeless Latino women in the Mission district of San Francisco.

Driven by both vocational call and the need to pay my bills, in 1997 I began teaching transpersonal graduate courses at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (ITP, now Sofia University) and in 1998 at CIIS. I taught courses as adjunct faculty and visiting professor for several years until I was offered a core faculty position at ITP, which prompted CIIS to offer me a similar arrangement; I became core faculty at CIIS in the year 2000.

**IP: What are the main ideas of your dissertation and first book? Explain to us briefly what is “the participatory turn”.**

**JF:** I wrote *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory* during 1994–1998 and defended it as my doctoral dissertation in 1999. *Revisioning* had two general goals: (a) to critically examine some central ontological and epistemological assumptions of transpersonal studies, and (b) to articulate a participatory alternative to the neo-perennialism dominating the field thus far.

At that time, the prevalent transpersonal models conceptualized spirituality in terms of replicable inner experiences amenable to be assessed or ranked according to purportedly universal developmental and/or ontological schemes. *Revisioning* reframed transpersonal phenomena as pluralistic participatory events that can occur in multiple loci (e.g., an individual, a relationship, or a collective) and whose epistemic value emerges — not from any pre-established hierarchy of spiritual insights— but from the events’ emancipatory and transformative power on self, community, and world. On a

scholarly level, I sought to bridge transpersonal discourse with relevant developments in religious studies (e.g., in comparative mysticism and the interreligious dialogue), as well as with a number of modern trends in the philosophy of mind and the cognitive sciences, such as Sellars’s (1963) critique of a pregiven world independent from human cognition and Varela, Thompson, and Rosch’s (1991) enactive paradigm of cognition.

Essentially, the *participatory turn* proposes to conceive human spirituality as emerging from our cocreative participation in a dynamic and undetermined mystery or generative power of life, the cosmos, and/or the spirit. More specifically, I argued that spiritual participatory events can engage the entire range of human epistemic faculties (e.g., rational, imaginal, somatic, vital, aesthetic, etc.) with the creative unfolding of reality or the mystery in the enactment—or “bringing forth”—of ontologically rich religious worlds. In other words, the participatory approach presents an enactive understanding of the sacred that conceives spiritual phenomena, experiences, and insights as *cocreated events*.

But what does it mean to say that spirituality is cocreated? As I see it, spiritual cocreation has three dimensions—intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal—which respectively establish participatory spirituality as *embodied*, *relational*, and *enactive*.

*Intrapersonal cocreation* consists of the collaborative participation of all human attributes—body, vital energy, heart, mind, and consciousness—in the enactment of spiritual phenomena. This dimension is grounded in the *principle of equiprimacy*, according to which no human attribute is intrinsically superior or more evolved than any other. It affirms that all human attributes can participate as equal partners in the creative unfolding of the spiritual path, are equally capable of sharing freely in the life of spirit here on earth, and can also be equally alienated from spirit. Intrapersonal cocreation stresses the importance of being rooted in *spirit within* (i.e., the immanent dimension of the mystery) and renders participatory spirituality essentially *embodied*.

*Interpersonal cocreation* emerges from cooperative relationships among human beings growing as peers in the spirit of solidarity, mutual respect, and constructive confrontation. It is grounded in the *principle of equipotentiality*, according to which “we are all teachers and students” insofar as we are superior and inferior to others in different regards. This doesn’t entail that there is no value in working with spiritual teachers or mentors; it simply means that human beings cannot be ranked in their totality or according to a single developmental criterion, such as brainpower, emotional intelligence, or contemplative realization. Although peer-to-peer human relationships are vital for spiritual growth, interpersonal cocreation can include contact with perceived nonhuman intelligences, such as subtle entities, natural powers, or archetypal forces that might be embedded in psyche,

nature, or the cosmos. Interpersonal cocreation affirms the importance of communion with *spirit in-between* (i.e., the situational dimension of the mystery) and makes participatory spirituality intrinsically *relational*.

*Transpersonal cocreation* refers to dynamic interaction between embodied human beings and the mystery in the bringing forth of spiritual insights, practices, states, and worlds. This dimension is grounded in the *principle of equiplurality*, according to which there can potentially be multiple spiritual enactments that are nonetheless equally holistic and emancipatory. This principle frees participatory spirituality from dogmatic commitment to any single spiritual system and paves the way for a genuine, metaphysically and pragmatically grounded, spiritual pluralism. Transpersonal cocreation affirms the importance of being open to *spirit beyond* (i.e., the transcendent dimension of the mystery) and makes participatory spirituality fundamentally inquiry-driven and *enactive*.

Although all three dimensions interact in multifaceted ways in the enactment of spiritual events, the creative link between intrapersonal and transpersonal cocreation deserves special mention. Whereas the mind and consciousness arguably serve as a natural bridge to subtle, transcendent spiritual forms already enacted in history that display more fixed forms and dynamics (e.g., cosmological motifs, archetypal configurations, mystical visions and states, etc.), attention to the body and its vital energies may give us a greater access to the more generative immanent power of life or the spirit. If we accept this approach, it follows that the greater the participation of embodied dimensions in religious inquiry, the more creative one's spiritual life may become and a larger number of creative spiritual developments may emerge.

**IP: In your proposal, you balance participatory pluralism with an emphasis on critical discernment in spiritual matters. Why is it important to make qualitative distinctions in spirituality?**

**JF:** Qualitative distinctions are fundamental both intra- and inter-religiously. Let me elaborate. At their mystical core, most traditions teach a path going from an initial state of suffering, alienation, or delusion to one of happiness, salvation, or enlightenment. In an intra-religious context, qualitative distinctions, for example among various stages or states of the path, can offer valuable signposts for practitioners insofar as they can inform them of being on the right track, alert them about stage-specific pitfalls, and so forth. This is why, although a strict allegiance to stage models can potentially constraint the organic unfolding of one's unique spiritual potentials, I don't see any major problem with them in the context of specific traditions, in which practitioners have committed to a particular spiritual goal. The prob-

lem emerges when one seeks to make the stages of one particular spiritual tradition (say Tibetan Buddhism or Christianity) or orientation (theistic, nondual, monist, etc.) paradigmatic for all; whether naively or intentionally carried out, the consistent upshot of this move is the privileging of one's spiritual tradition over all others—an attitude that I discuss below in terms of “spiritual narcissism.” In any event, generally speaking, it seems important—and common sense—to acknowledge that the understanding of emptiness (*sunyata*) of a novice Buddhist monk is most likely not as complete or sophisticated as the Dalai Lama's (although remember Suzuki's (1970) famous claim that the beginner's mind is closer to enlightenment than the one of the seasoned practitioner).

Inter-religiously, we can also observe qualitative differences among traditions and this is important from both “positive” and “negative” angles. In a “positive” light, for example, some traditions may have developed contemplative awareness more than others, and the same could be said about psychophysical integration, emotional intelligence, social service, or eco-spiritual understandings and practices fostering a harmonious relationship with nature. In a “negative” light, some traditions may be more prey than others to somatic dissociation, sexual repression, class oppression, religious violence, or ecological blindness, among others. The fact that different traditions have cultivated different human potentials is part of what makes inter-religious cross-fertilization fruitful and potentially crucial for a more integral spiritual development.

Moving away from historical rankings of spiritual traditions as wholes according to doctrinal standpoints, my work invites to cultivate a more nuanced and contextually sensitive evaluative gaze based on the recognition that traditions, like human beings, are likely to be both “higher” and “lower” in relation to one another, but *in different regards* (e.g., in fostering contemplative competences, eco-spiritual awareness, mind/body integration, and so forth). It is important then not to understand the ideal of a symmetrical encounter among traditions in terms of a trivializing or relativistic egalitarianism. By contrast, a truly symmetrical encounter can only take place when traditions open themselves to teach and be taught, fertilize and be fertilized, transform and be transformed.

In contrast to the postulation of qualitative distinctions among traditions according to a priori doctrines (e.g., theism, monism, or nondualism corresponds to the nature of ultimate reality and/or is intrinsically superior) and associated hierarchies of spiritual insights, my participatory perspective grounds such distinctions in a variety of practical or transformational fruits (existential, cognitive, emotional, interpersonal, etc.). In *Revisoning* I suggested two basic guidelines: the *egocentrism test*, which assesses the extent to which spiritual traditions,

teachings, and practices free practitioners from gross and subtle forms of narcissism and self-centeredness; and the *dissociation test*, which evaluates the extent to which the same foster the integrated blossoming of all dimensions of the person. Given the many abuses and oppressions perpetuated in the name of religion, I later added the *eco-social-political test*, which assesses the extent to which spiritual systems foster ecological balance, social and economic justice, religious and political freedom, class and gender equality, and other fundamental human rights. Concerning validity of doctrines, thus, I take a pragmatist approach inspired by the Buddhist teaching of “skillful means” (*upaya*). I posit that spiritual teachings (and practices) are valid insofar as they work and deliver their promised fruits; that is, insofar as they help people become less self-centered, create wholesome communities, lead to better relations with the environment, and so forth.

As for the thorny question of hierarchical rankings, note that since it is likely that most religious traditions would not rank too highly in many of the above tests, the participatory approach may also lead to strong spiritual rankings. The crucial difference is that these rankings are not ideologically based on a priori religious doctrines, but instead ground critical discernment in the practical values of selflessness, embodiment, integration, and eco-social-political justice and freedom. I stand by these values, not because I think they are “universal” (they are not), but because I firmly believe that their cultivation can effectively reduce personal, relational, social, and planetary suffering.

**IP: What is your point of view regarding the perennial philosophy?**

**JF:** On a theoretical level, the most influential transpersonal models I encountered in California subscribed to neo-perennialist (universalist) accounts of spiritual diversity that I came to see as both reductionist and problematic. There are of course numerous varieties of perennialism and neo-perennialism (e.g., Neo-Vedantic, Sufi, esotericist, Wilberian, etc.), but, despite their supposedly inclusivist stance, they all ultimately privilege certain religious traditions or spiritual goals over others and result in an oversimplification, distortion, or limitation of the vast and rich possibilities for human spiritual flourishing. For example, I think that the Schuon-Smith hypothesis of esoteric unity and exoteric diversity (which entered transpersonal discourse through the work of both Grof and Wilber) is erroneous and it doesn't stand against historical, textual, and phenomenological evidence. Even within a single tradition, disagreement among contemplative practitioners abounds. Take Buddhism for example: Zen and Tibetan Buddhist teachers strongly disagree about the ultimate nature of reality; are they not considered Buddhist *esoteric* or *mystical* practi-

tioners? In addition, there are important differences among traditions at their so-called mystical core. For example, when Theravada Buddhists talk about *sunyata* or emptiness and Taoists talk about the Tao, or Christians talk about God, they are talking about radically different things.

On a practical level, I gradually became aware that neo-perennialist visions were neither sensitive enough to the diversity of individual spiritual needs, dispositions, and developmental dynamics, nor generous enough to the infinite creative potential of the mystery (understood, not as a reifiable spiritual ultimate, but as the generative power of life, reality, the cosmos, and/or spirit). In other words, many spiritual seekers were struggling to make their spiritual experiences conform to a pre-given pathway aimed at the particular spiritual goal that those visions presented as most enlightened or spiritually evolved, thereby unconsciously sabotaging the natural process of their own unique spiritual unfolding and constraining the creative potential of the spiritual power that can manifest through them. Although fruits can be obtained from a commitment to almost any spiritual practice, the final outcome of these endeavors was often a spiritual life that was devitalized, stagnated, dissociated, or conflicted.

Although my work advocates for the existence of diversity at mystical, cosmological, and metaphysical levels, I also believe that we can legitimately talk about a mystery out of which everything arises. The problem is that as soon as anyone “essentializes” the mystery in terms of particular qualities (e.g., empty, personal, nondual, etc.), the challenges of spiritual pluralism re-emerge. And, it is important to consider that such mystery may be also evolving with us through cocreative participation; for example, nondual consciousness *might* be the origin of things, but that doesn't mean that that's where we may want to go spiritually speaking. Taking such origin as a goal might be actually regressive in an evolutionary context. We might be able to access such supposed foundation, but my question is, where do we want to go with that *today*?

Thus, can we embrace the world's irreducible spiritual diversity as something positive? Can we entertain that different traditions may have found unique soteriological solutions for the human dilemma, and that they may be advancing the creativity of the mystery in different evolutionary directions? If we accept this view, there may be overlapping qualities among traditions, but we don't need to come to identical truths or principles.

**IP: In relation to your critique of the perennial philosophy, you have also critiqued religious exclusivism and its associated spiritual narcissism. Can you speak about this?**

**JF:** This is a very important question with many practi-

al ramifications. Indeed, too often, religious traditions and practitioners look down upon one another, each believing that their truth is more complete or final, and that their path is the only or most effective one to achieve full salvation or enlightenment. I believe that a way out of this predicament is to uncover, expose, and ultimately overcome the spiritual narcissism underlying such religious exclusivism, which is unfortunately pandemic in human spiritual history. Put simply, *spiritual narcissism* is the conscious or unconscious belief that one's favored tradition or spiritual choice is universally or holistically superior.

Spiritual narcissism should not be confused with psychological narcissism, since one can be mostly free from the latter and still be prey of the former. Consider, for example, the Dalai Lama's defense of the need of a plurality of religions. While celebrating the existence of different religions to accommodate the diversity of human karmic dispositions, he contends that final spiritual liberation can only be achieved through the emptiness practices of his own school of Tibetan Buddhism, implicitly situating all other spiritual choices as lower—a view that he believes all other Buddhists and religious people will eventually accept. That the Dalai Lama himself—arguably a paragon of spiritual humility and open-mindedness—holds this view strongly suggests that spiritual narcissism is not necessarily associated with a narcissistic personality but rather a deeply seated tendency buried in the collective realms of the human unconscious. Interestingly, the Buddhist scholar Douglas Duckworth (2013) recently published a paper in the journal *Sophia* presenting participatory pluralism as an alternative to Tibetan Buddhist inclusivism.

In addition to impoverishing human relations, both spiritual narcissism and religious exclusivism play an important role in many interreligious conflicts, quarrels, and even holy wars. Although it would be ingenuous to believe that these conflicts are entirely or even mostly driven by religious sentiments (social, economic, political, and ethnic issues are often central), the rhetoric of religious exclusivism or superiority is widely used across the globe to fuel fundamentalist tendencies and justify interreligious violence. After all, it is much easier to kill your neighbor when you believe that God is on your side!

As an antidote to this global malady, I have proposed that different religious worlds and spiritual ultimates are cocreated through human participation in a dynamic and undetermined mystery, spiritual power, and/or generative force of life or the cosmos. Such mystery is alive and dynamically creative versus having a static or pre-given nature that spiritual knowing must somehow access or mirror. I believe that this account is more generous with the inexhaustible creativity of the mystery, which in this light can be seen as branching out in multiple ontological directions. In other words, in

contrast to spiritual visions holding a single return to the One or nondual awareness, I take the view that the mystery, the cosmos, and/or spirit unfolds from a primordial state of undifferentiated unity toward one of (perhaps infinite) differentiation-in-communion.

In the context of our current discussion, this participatory account immediately frees religions from the assumption of a single, predetermined ultimate reality that binds them to exclusivist dogmatisms. Why? Because seeing the various religious worlds not as competing to match a pre-given spiritual referent but as creative transformations of an undetermined spiritual power effectively short-circuits their competitive predicament. Closely related is my contention that there is a plurality of salvations, enlightenments, or spiritual goals that cannot be hierarchically arranged (even if, as discussed above, in the context of a single tradition, certain hierarchies of spiritual states may be valid). This recognition frees us from the deeply seated belief that there must be one single spiritual goal for all humanity, which too often conveniently resembles the one described by *my* favored tradition. More positively, the proposed indeterminacy of the mystery invites to cultivate an attitude of spiritual humility that overcomes self-deceptive certainties and fosters a surrendering to a mystery that can never be fully comprehended by the human mind and its conceptual understandings.

If we accept this approach, it will then no longer be a contested issue whether people endorse a theistic, nondual, or naturalistic account of the mystery, or whether their chosen path of spiritual cultivation is meditation, social engagement, conscious parenting,entheogenic shamanism, or communion with nature. (Of course, each path can be complemented with practices that cultivate other human potentials). The new spiritual bottom line, in contrast, will be the degree into which each path fosters both an overcoming of self-centeredness and a fully embodied integration that make us not only more sensitive to the needs of others, nature, and the world, but also more effective cultural and planetary transformative agents in whatever contexts and measure life or spirit calls us to be.

**IP: Tell us about your first publications in the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology (JTP) and your debate with Ken Wilber.**

**JF:** My first JTP publication, "Speak now or forever hold your truth," appeared in 1998 and was a critical review of Wilber's (1998a) *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*, in which he sought to integrate science and religion under the umbrella of a broad empiricism. Here I critiqued what I perceived as a residual positivism in his proposal that I found counterproductive for the legitimization of spiritual knowledge. This residual positivism was perhaps most evident in his defense of an unified

methodology, drawn from the natural sciences, that used the widely discredited Popperian falsifiability as demarcation criterion between genuine and dogmatic knowledge in both science and spirituality. In his response, also published in JTP, Wilber (1998b) wrote that by falsifiability he simply meant “we hold all our experiences open to further refinement.” As I retorted in *Re-visioning*, however, in the philosophy of science, the provisional nature of knowledge doesn’t refer to falsifiability, but to *fallibilism*, something that everybody (even the hard scientists) accept as a *feature* of human knowledge since the nineteenth century, but not as a principle of epistemic *justification* or of *demarcation* between genuine and dogmatic knowledge (as Wilber used it). Although Wilber never responded to this rejoinder, he stopped using Popperian falsifiability in subsequent works so I can only assume that the critique was effective even if he never acknowledged its validity.

My second JTP publication, “The perennial philosophy revisited,” appeared in 2000 and was a general critique of the perennialist assumptions of transpersonal psychology that only mentioned Wilber tangentially (I later discussed Wilber’s neo-perennialism in *Re-visioning*). The paper became the leading essay of the first issue of the Journal edited by Kaisa Puhakka (Miles Vich had been the editor since the Journal’s inception in 1969). To my great surprise, I learnt that Wilber tried to prevent its publication by directly calling the new editor on the phone. (And this was not the last time that I discovered he sought to actively censor the publication of my work). When Puhakka naturally refused to comply, Wilber insisted that she should “print one paper favorable of my perspective for every paper you print that is critical of it.” Once again, Puhakka refused to comply—I trust there is no need to argue that such a request is not only obviously unacceptable but also literally unheard of in the academic world. One or two days later, Wilber (2000a) sent a message to the organizers of a transpersonal conference in Assisi, Italy, announcing that he has “ceased . . . affiliation with the Transpersonal Psychology movement” (p. 1), that JTP “might collapse within a year” (p. 1) (after giving an incorrect number about its circulation), and that “the moment someone suggested ‘transpersonal’ as the name, that moment the field was dead” (p. 2). As he did later in related essays posted in the web, he then introduced his own “integral psychology” as the way forward for serious students of psychology and spirituality.

Before I go further: I am not suggesting that the above event was the only or even main factor in Wilber’s departure from the field. It is very likely that the *ReVision* conversation of 1996—collected in Rothberg and Sean Kelly’s (1998) *Ken Wilber in Dialogue*—which revealed strong disagreements and even interpersonal conflicts between Wilber and major transpersonal theorists, paved the way for his decision.

In an online *Shambhala* interview, “The demise of transpersonal psychology,” Wilber (2002a; see also Wilber, 2000b) outlined the reasons why he left the field and considered transpersonal psychology to be dead. Those included that psychology as a science of interiors was dead, that transpersonal psychology had become ideological, and that the field was fraught in quarrels and disagreements. These reasons were suspicious, especially considering the contemporary vigor of depth psychology, Wilber’s propensity to label as “ideological” any perspective critical of his work, and that virtually all conflicts in the field had been between him and other scholars after his dismissive remarks of alternative spiritual approaches in *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (Wilber, 1995a). And it goes without saying that healthy disagreement and theoretical plurality are marks of the maturity, not decline, of an academic discipline.

In an apparent attempt to deviate attention from those recent events, Wilber claimed to have stopped using the term *transpersonal* to refer to his work in 1983; however, this claim is contradicted by any cursory survey of his post-1983 writings. In *Grace and Grit* (1991), for example, he described himself as “the foremost theorist in transpersonal psychology” (p. 22); in his contribution to Walsh and Vaughan’s *Paths Beyond Ego* (1993), he portrayed transpersonal psychology as the only field that offered a comprehensive vision of the human being (Wilber, 1993); and in his JTP article, “An informal overview of transpersonal studies” (1995b), he located integral psychology as an approach *within* transpersonal psychology.

Naturally, those of us aware of the sequence of events leading to his departure from the field did not give much credibility to his diatribe, but for most transpersonal scholars both in the USA and worldwide his departure from the field was, in Michael Washburn’s (2003) words, a “seismic event” (p. 6). Although Wilber’s attempt to assassinate transpersonal psychology failed, it pushed the field into an identity crisis from which it is still recovering. This is in part why I have decided to go public with this information after all these years. I frankly think the time is ripe to set the record straight.

**IP: Do you think that your participatory critique is still valid for Wilber’s most recent work (Wilber-5)?**

**JF:** A few years ago, one prominent member of the Integral Institute (who prefers to remain anonymous) wrote me saying that Wilber-5 was a “participatory revision of Wilber-4.” Indeed, as Michael Daniels pointed out, Wilber-5’s proposed cocreated nature of the spiritual path, language of participation, and use of the myth of the given in spiritual critical discourse are central features of the participatory approach introduced in my early work (see Rowan, Daniels, Fontana, & Walley,



2009). Initially, I was startled by this participatory reform, especially given Wilber's (2002b) dismissive account of *Revisioning* as expressing "a green-meme approach to spirituality, a kind of participatory samsara equated with nirvana" (unpaginated). As Daniels points out, however, Wilber often displays the disturbing scholarly habit of incorporating into his theorizing critical points made by others about his work—at times points he previously dismissed as misinformed or conveying less evolved levels of spiritual discernment—and presenting them as autonomous developments of his thinking. In this case, Wilber-5 has seemingly assimilated aspects of the participatory approach into his integral vision; from a participatory perspective, however, many problems remain.

Despite Wilber's (2006) significant revisions (e.g., letting go of 'involutionary givens' in transpersonal stages), his current model holds that (1) spiritual development and evolution follow a sequence of (now evolutionarily laid down) states and stages (psychic/subtle/causal/nondual); (2) this sequence is universal, paradigmatic, and mandatory for all human beings regardless of culture, tradition, or spiritual orientation; (3) nondual realization is the single ultimate summit of spiritual growth; and (4) spiritual traditions are geared to the cultivation of particular states and stages. To be sure, the Wilber-Combs lattice complicates this account further by allowing that practitioners from any tradition and at any developmental stage can, in theory, access all transpersonal states (though the states would be interpreted from those corresponding perspectives). Wilber-5, however, retains a core problem and adds a new one. On the one hand, some traditions still rank lower than others since they aim at supposedly less advanced spiritual states and stages (e.g., theistic traditions rank lower than nondual ones, shamanic ones lower than theistic, etc.). On the other hand, the new grace offered to rival traditions is a Faustian bargain: theistic and shamanic practitioners are told that they too can reach the most advanced spiritual stage, but only if they sacrifice the integrity of their own tradition's self-understanding by accepting Wilber's spiritual itinerary and nondual endpoint. (Note here that since Wilber's nonduality is admittedly different than traditional versions, even nondual practitioners may need to strike this bargain in order to qualify as 'proper' suitors of his final realization). Although different traditions obviously focus on the enacting of particular mystical states and goals, I strongly dispute the plausibility and legitimacy of Wilber's hierarchical rankings.

Summing up, even after Wilber's (2006) *ad hoc* modifications, his current model still privileges nondual, monistic, and formless spiritualities over theistic and visionary ones, even as it seeks to confine the multiplicity of spiritual expressions to a single, unilinear sequence of spiritual development. Furthermore, Wilber-5 contin-

ues to reduce the rich diversity of spiritual goals (deification, *kaivalyam*, *devekut*, *nirvana*, *fana*, visionary service, *uniomystica*, etc.) to a rather peculiar hybrid of Buddhist emptiness and Advaita/Zen nondual embrace of the phenomenal world. Insofar as Wilber's model retains this neo-perennialist construction, as well as its associated doctrinal rankings of spiritual states, stages, and traditions, the essence of the participatory critique is both applicable and arguably effective. From a participatory perspective, Wilber's nondual realization is simply one among many other feasible spiritual enactments—one that it is not entirely holistic from any contemporary perspective recognizing the equal spiritual import of both transcendent and immanent spiritual sources (for extended discussion, see Ferrer, 2011a).

**IP:** In your work, you talk about two spiritual sources—"immanent life" and "transcendent consciousness"—as "two sides of the same coin." Could you clarify this distinction and tell us why you think it is important?

**JF:** I see immanent life and transcendent consciousness as two energetic states of the mystery. Immanent life is undifferentiated in the sense that it contains all the potentials of such energy yet to be manifested. When this energy undergoes a process of transformation, it differentiates into all the concrete manifestations of reality we are familiar with (e.g., physical, vital-energetic, emotional, mental, and so forth). We can see transcendent consciousness as a highly refined and differentiated transformation of immanent life.

In human reality, immanent life shapes our sense of vitality, sexuality, creativity, and instinctive wisdom, and transcendent consciousness our self-awareness, discernment, and contemplative wisdom. Even though spiritual traditions tended to privilege transcendent consciousness over immanent life (often leading to what I call a "*heart-chakra up*" spirituality and even dissociated spiritual practices and understandings), I see both spiritual sources as equally fundamental for the cultivation of a fully embodied and genuinely integral spirituality—a spirituality that grounds us firmly in our embodied reality while simultaneously opening us to the transcendent without needing to leave or escape from our everyday lives. This "double incarnation" of immanent and transcendent spiritual sources naturally fosters a sense of interpersonal communion with other human beings, nature, and the cosmos; it also enhances the creative vitality and inspired discernment necessary to effectively guide our actions in the transformation of the world.

In a context of spiritual aspiration, this distinction is important for the following reason: Since for most modern people the conscious mind is the seat of our

sense of identity, an exclusive liberation of consciousness can be deceptive insofar as we can believe that we are fully free when, in fact, essential dimensions of ourselves are underdeveloped or in bondage—as the unethical interpersonal or sexual behavior of so many spiritual teachers attest. The participatory perspective I have articulated in my writings seeks to foster the harmonious engagement of all human attributes in the spiritual path without tensions or dissociations. To achieve this, a consideration of the distinct but equally fundamental role that immanent and transcendent spiritual sources—or life energy and consciousness—have in spiritual development is crucial.

With this in mind, I have proposed an *integral bodhisattva vow* in which the conscious mind renounces full liberation until the body, the heart, and the primary world can be free as well from alienating tendencies that prevent them from sharing freely in the unfolding life of the mystery here on earth. It goes without saying that to embrace an integral bodhisattva vow is not a return to the individualistic spiritual aspirations of early Buddhism because it entails a commitment to the *integral* liberation of all sentient beings, rather than only of their conscious minds or conventional sense of identity.

**IP: Can you elaborate on the integral bodhisattva vow (IBV)? In what ways is different from traditional spiritual pursuits?**

**JF:** Personally, the IBV gradually emerged in my embodied awareness after many years of Buddhist practice. Both during meditation retreats and in everyday life, I tasted the joys, lures, and shadows of an exclusive liberation in consciousness—a typical goal and outcome of the “heart-chakra up” spirituality I referred to earlier. Eventually, I resolved to focus more on what I came to call *spiritual individuation* (i.e., the process through which a person gradually develops and embodies his or her unique spiritual identity and wholeness) than on traditional goals of enlightenment (many of which I also came to see as limited and even dissociated).

At some point, I became aware of the structural similarity between this move and the traditional Buddhist bodhisattva vow, in the sense that in both cases the practitioner renounces liberation for an arguably more expansive purpose. Where as the traditional vow’s focus is interpersonal (and, historically, often translated in Buddhist proselytism), the focus of the integral version was intra-personal and, the way I understand it, it can be taken in the context of any spiritual tradition ready to explore more holistic understandings and practices.

In any event, I now firmly believe that the cultivation of spiritual individuation regulated by something like the IBV may be more effective than traditional paths to enlightenment in promoting not only the fully harmonious development of the person but also holistic spiri-

tual realizations. This may be so because most traditional contemplative paths cultivate a disembodied, and potentially dissociative, spirituality even while providing access to such spiritual heights as classical mystical visions, ecstatic unions, and absorptions. Reasonably, one might ask whether the path of spiritual individuation may render such spiritual heights less likely—perhaps—but I wonder aloud whether our current individual, relational, social, and ecological predicament calls us to sacrifice some ‘height’ for ‘breadth’ (and arguably ‘depth’). Put bluntly, in general it may be preferable today to shift our focus from those spiritual heights in order to ‘horizontalize,’ or pursue spiritual depths in the nitty-gritty of our embodied existence. Even if slowly and making mistakes, I personally choose to walk toward such uncharted integral horizons rather than the “road more traveled” of disembodied spirituality.

**IP: You have taught courses on transpersonal sexuality at CIIS, facilitated workshops on Holistic Sexuality, and are writing a book on spirituality, sexuality, and relationships. Can you give us a sense of what it means for you to live sexuality holistically?**

**JF:** On a conceptual level, it is essential to cultivate an understanding of sexuality as one of the first soils for the transformation of immanent spiritual life in human reality. This is why is so important that sexuality is an open soil free from psychosomatic blockages and traumas, habits and conditionings, as well as cultural and even spiritual ideologies about the “right” way to be sexual. An open sexual soil becomes more porous to the creative force of immanent spiritual life, as well as to the light of transcendent consciousness, naturally sacralizing our sexuality and potentially turning into a prime motor of our spiritual development. As the research of transpersonal scholar Jenny Wade (2004) shows, sexuality is an arena where people can enact all the spiritual states described by the traditions—from the presence of God to mystical absorptions to nonduality—as well as, I would add, novel spiritual realizations.

On a practical level, the Holistic Sexuality work cocreated by Albareda and Romero (currently offered in the States by Romero and Samuel Malkemus) aims at the integration of immanent life and the energy of consciousness at all levels of the person (physical, vital, emotional, mental, etc.) so that human beings can be both vitalized and awake in fuller ways. Although there are today many methods of working with sexuality in a spiritual context (e.g., neo-Tantric), I think Holistic Sexuality is unique in the systematic attention it pays to such immanent/transcendent integration and the impressive array of novel practices it provides for this purpose.

At the level of sexual behavior, there are two elements that in my experience are central to foster a holistic context: liberation from orgasm compulsion and

prolonged engagement of sexual energies. Both are obviously related since freedom from the need for orgasm naturally leads to extended time in sexual activity. In my personal trajectory, both organically unfolded after a 3-year period of celibacy, but you don't need to become celibate to live your sexuality more holistically. It can be fostered by simple practices such intentional slowing of sexual activity, taking pauses to allow the energy activated to spread throughout the body, various forms of body work, alternating periods of sexual stimulation and meditation, and cultivating an attitude of genuine curiosity, unconditional acceptance, beginner's mind, and inquiry when approaching the mystery of Eros.

When sexual energy is freed from deeply seated biological habits (after all, orgasm was evolutionarily shaped by reproductive goals), it gradually spreads through the human body—in both its physical and energetic dimensions. This is also why in a context of embodied spiritual aspiration, it becomes fundamental to rescue, in a non-narcissistic manner, the dignity and spiritual significance of physical pleasure. As Albareda and Romero explain, in the same way that pain “contracts” the body, pleasure “relaxes” it, making it more porous to the presence and flow of both immanent and transcendent spiritual energies. In this light, the formidable magnetic force of the sexual drive can be seen as attracting consciousness to matter, facilitating both its embodiment and grounding in the world and the development of an incarnational process that transforms both the individual and the world.

All this makes sexuality a spiritual practice in and of itself, a relational meditation, a celebration of embodied spirit, a prayer.

**IP: How do you see the participatory paradigm ten years after? Did it grow and consolidate?**

**JF:** For my part, after the publication of *Revisioning*, I explored the implications of the participatory turn for such areas as integral transformative practice, embodied spirituality, integral education and the teaching of mysticism, religious studies, spiritual individuation and the future of religion, and metaphysics and enlightenment, among others. As discussed in my JTP article, “Transpersonal theory and participatory spirituality: A ten-year retrospective” (2011b), transpersonal scholars have understood the participatory approach as a disciplinary model, theoretical orientation or perspective, and paradigm or paradigmatic epoch. In general, my sense is that it is regarded as one of the main theoretical orientation of the field (together with the depth psychological and neo-perennialist) and transpersonal philosophical paradigms.

In addition to transpersonal studies, the participatory perspective has also impacted fields such as consciousness studies, integral and holistic education, and

religious studies. For example, attention to the participatory perspective in religious studies noticeably increased following the publication of my co-edited (with Jacob H. Sherman) anthology, *The Participatory Turn: Spirituality, Mysticism, Religious Studies* (2008) (published in Spanish by Ed. Kairos as *El giro participativo*). Besides the anthology's essays—which engaged traditions such as Sufism, Kabbalah, Christianity, and Hinduism—the 2010 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) featured a well-received session on *The Participatory Turn* and a second panel engaging contemplative studies from a participatory perspective was presented at the 2011 AAR Annual Meeting.

Thus, I think it is safe to say that during the past decade there has been a growing literature on the participatory perspective in transpersonal studies and related disciplines. Although the number of transpersonal authors influenced by participatory thinking is increasing, it should be obvious that transpersonal psychology is today a richly pluralistic field populated by many other theoretical orientations of equal or greater influence. My sense is that the participatory movement can be better characterized as a *network* of independent thinkers sharing a similar scholarly/spiritual sensibility (e.g., about the cocreated nature of spiritual knowledge, the centrality of embodiment and multidimensional cognition, and/or the import of spiritual pluralism) than as a school of thought or discipline formalized through traditional scholarly structures.

Although participatory associations, programs, journals, and book series may be launched in the future, I see this network-nature of the participatory movement advantageous for two reasons. On the one hand, a network promotes the transdisciplinary dissemination of the participatory perspective, preventing the scholarly isolation that afflicts many schools of thought and tends to limit the scope of their action to in-house disciplinary conversations among their members. In a similar vein, arguing against an APA division for transpersonal psychology, Stanley Krippner suggested that the creation of the APA division of humanistic psychology reduced the influence that a more diffuse movement operating throughout extant APA groups might have had on the discipline of psychology (see Schroll, Krippner, Vich, & Mojeiko, 2009, pp. 42-43).

On the other hand, the inherently pluralistic character of a network can house greater theoretical diversity (think, for example, of the Scientific and Medical Network in the United Kingdom) than a school of thought, which often achieves its identity through commitment to specific paradigmatic assumptions or conceptual frameworks. Hence, a network-type organization is not only coherent with the pluralistic ethos of the participatory movement, but also fecund in the sense of not imposing a priori theoretical constraints via premature

commitments to particular models or the aspiration to converge into a unified theory.

**IP: What are for you the main issues and debates within the Transpersonal Psychology movement right now?**

**JF:** I would highlight three issues: (1) overcoming the identity crisis of the field, (2) clarifying its relationship with science, and (3) increasing its social and academic legitimacy. Since I am writing an essay addressing the latter two questions, I will consider here the first one.

Essentially, I think that transpersonal psychology is ready to overcome once and for all its longstanding identity crisis (arguably intensified by Wilber's departure) and the related, Sisyphus-like undertaking of endlessly trying to define itself. Although these efforts have delivered valuable fruits, especially thanks to Glenn Hartelius' (e.g., Hartelius, Rothe, & Roy, 2013) work, this definitional obsession plays inadvertently into Wilber's (2000a letter) claim that "nobody knows what the word [transpersonal] means; its foremost people cannot define it" (p. 2).

Personally, I think that neither the overstated lack of consensual definition of transpersonal psychology nor the associated plurality of understandings of the term *transpersonal*, should be seen as specific to the field or as a negative. On the one hand, many well-established disciplines don't have such a consensual definition, including not only psychology (which has been featured as a fragmented field due to its diversity of orientations; e.g., Slife & Williams, 1997) and philosophy (where internal debate abounds about foundational issues; consider differences among analytic, continental, and postmodern philosophers) but even science itself. Despite the idealized accounts of a singular scientific method one can find in science textbooks, the very definition and understanding of science has not only been strongly contested by philosophers of science and sociologists of knowledge for decades (remember the Science Wars of the 1990s), but also demonstrably changed over time. In addition, profound differences among the actual practices of many scientific disciplines has led philosophers of science to coin the expression "disunity of science" to characterize the contemporary scientific scene (e.g., Dupré, 1993). In this context, dismissing or self-doubting transpersonal psychology because there is not definitional consensus seems preposterous.

On the other hand, the diversity of perspectives shaping contemporary transpersonalism, far from indicating its decay, can be seen as a sign of the field's maturity as well as of the creative power that is being channeled through the transpersonal project. Such power can

be seen as catalyzing and materializing the creative urges of the mystery through human empirical, embodied, hermeneutic, and visionary/contemplative participation. Theoretical plurality only worries those still bewitched by the positivist pursuit of a unified Theory of Everything.

In contrast to essentialist definitions and theoretical homogeneity, I suggest that what a wholesome and vital discipline of knowledge needs is a rather malleable delimitation of the following five aspects: (a) areas of inquiry (i.e., what is being studied), (b) methodological approaches to such study, (c) appropriate epistemologies (as validity standards to assess inquiry outcomes and knowledge claims), (d) theoretical models and orientations (as the conceptual frameworks to interpret the inquiry outcomes brought forth by methods), and (e) philosophical or metaphysical paradigms (as ontological or metaphysical assumptions underlying the methodologies, and theoretical models). In my view, transpersonal psychology has had reasonable (though not always clearly systematized) delimitations of most of these aspects for quite some time.

But today's transpersonal corpus includes an impressive array of works that soundly map out the field's topical, methodological, epistemological, theoretical, and philosophical constituents. In terms of areas of inquiry, for example, I refer to Friedman and Hartelius's (2013) recent *Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Transpersonal Psychology* as well as to Scotton, Chinen, and Battista's (1996) *Textbook of Transpersonal Psychiatry and Psychology* with its most clinical emphasis. For methodological and epistemological discussions, one can consult Braud and Anderson's (1998) *Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, Anderson and Braud's (2011) *Transforming Self and Others through Research: Transpersonal Research Methods and Skills for the Human Sciences and Humanities*, Heron's (1998) *Sacred Science*, and many relevant JTP articles by Tart, Braud, Friedman, and MacDonald, among others. For theoretical approaches and related epistemologies, I refer to the work of Friedman (2002, 2013) and MacDonald (2013) for the scientific approach, Grof (1985) and Washburn (1994) for depth psychological approaches, Wilber (1995a, 2006) for the neo-perennialist approach, and Tarnas (1991), Heron (1998, 2006), Ferrer (2002, 2011b), Hartelius (Hartelius, 2006; Hartelius & Ferrer, 2013), and Lahood (2007, 2008) for participatory approaches. In terms of setting the contours of the field, I would also include here the highly integrative works of the British transpersonalists, Lancaster's (2004) *Approaches to Consciousness* and Daniels's (2005) *Shadow, Self, Spirit: Essays in Transpersonal Psychology*.

This list is of course merely illustrative—the point is that these and many other solid transpersonal works strongly suggest that the time has come to stop ruminating about the nature of the field, to take pride in

what we have achieved so far, to focus on transpersonal research (e.g., quantitative and qualitative, hermeneutic and critical, entheogenic and contemplative, etc.), and to allow such scholarly acts to shape the future of the field.

**IP: Which are your main interests right now? What are you working on? What are your plans for the future?**

**JF:** In addition to my ongoing teaching at CIIS, I have been for some years working with two marvelous teacher plants—San Pedro (*wachuma*) and voacanga Africana—so I think it is safe to say that entheogenic shamanism has become more central to my interests and spiritual practice. For some time, I have been trying to document the entheogenic phenomenon I call “shared visions” (that is, intersubjective agreement about ostensibly autonomous subtle energies or entities seen with open eyes in the world “out there”), which I believe it represents a significant challenge for the currently prevalent scientific materialism or naturalism.

Scholarly, I recently submitted an article to JTP, “Transpersonal psychology, science, and the supernatural” in which I am combating what I perceive as an emerging scientism in the field. In particular, the article addresses Harris Friedman’s proposal to restrict the term *transpersonal psychology* to refer to the scientific study of transpersonal phenomena and use the broader category *transpersonal studies* for non-empirical approaches. Part of this paper will also be included in a book chapter, “On the nature and future of transpersonal psychology,” I have written for an upcoming transpersonal anthology co-edited by Douglas MacDonald and Manuel Almenro.

I am also preparing an anthology of my writings for the State University of New York Press: *Participation and Spirit: Transpersonal Essays in Psychology, Education, and Religion*. As soon as I complete it, I plan to return to the writing of another book in progress, *A Finer Love: Spirituality, Sexuality, and the Evolution of Intimate Relationships*, which focuses on how the gradual integration of sexual (eros) and spiritual (agape) love can transform both our spiritual lives and intimate relationships—I guess I like to keep busy!

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