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# PARTICIPATORY SPIRITUALITY AND TRANSPERSONAL THEORY

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My contribution to the participatory turn in transpersonal studies was formalized in 2002, when *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory* (*Revisioning* hereafter) was published shortly after R. Tarnas's (2001) preview of the book.<sup>1</sup> The book had two general goals: (1) to critically examine some central ontological and epistemological assumptions of transpersonal studies, and (2) to introduce a participatory alternative to the neo-perennialism dominating the field thus far. At that time, R. Tarnas (1991) had already laid the foundations of a spiritually informed participatory epistemology, Kremer (1994) had developed a participatory approach to Indigenous spirituality, and Heron (1992, 1996, 1998) had introduced a participatory inquiry method as a relational form of spiritual practice and articulated a participatory ontology and epistemology. Nonetheless, the prevalent transpersonal models conceptualized spirituality in terms of replicable inner experiences amenable to be assessed or ranked according to purportedly universal developmental 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 preestablished 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 or 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 entirely independent

from human cognition and Varela, Thompson, and Rosch's (1991) enactive paradigm of cognition.<sup>2</sup>

In the wake of increasing interest from other scholars in the participatory perspective, I subsequently explored the implications of the participatory turn for such areas as transpersonal science and research programs (see chapter 2), embodied spirituality (see chapter 3), integral transformative practice (see chapter 4), integral education (see chapters 5 and 6), contemplative education and spiritual inquiry (see chapter 7), consciousness research and integral theory (see chapters 8 and 9), religious pluralism and the future of religion (see chapter 10), and contemporary religious studies (Ferrer & Sherman, 2008a), among others. Most of these developments are included in this book.

More than a decade after the publication of *Revisioning*, the main aim of this chapter is to assess the current status and ongoing impact of the participatory turn in transpersonal studies.<sup>3</sup> Although ample reference is made to the work of many other participatory thinkers, the analysis focuses on the impact of my work. After an outline of the participatory approach to transpersonal and spiritual phenomena, I identify three ways it has been received in transpersonal scholarship: as disciplinary model, theoretical orientation, and paradigmatic epoch. Then I examine the influence of the participatory turn in transpersonal and related disciplines, respond to several criticisms of my work, and conclude by reflecting on the nature and future of the participatory movement. My hope is that this chapter provides not only an introduction to participatory transpersonalism, but also a collection of scholarly resources for those interested in exploring or pursuing a participatory orientation in transpersonal scholarship.

#### AN OUTLINE OF PARTICIPATORY SPIRITUALITY

Developed over time (e.g., Ferrer, 1998a, 1998b, 2000a, 2000b, 2001), published as a book (Ferrer, 2002), and expanded in an anthology (Ferrer & Sherman, 2008a; Ferrer, 2008), the participatory approach holds that human spirituality essentially emerges from human cocreative participation in an undetermined mystery or generative power of life, the cosmos, or reality. More specifically, I argue that spiritual participatory events can engage the entire range of human epistemic faculties (e.g., rational, imaginal, somatic, vital, aesthetic) with both the creative unfolding of the mystery and the possible agency of subtle entities or energies in the enactment—or “bringing forth”—of ontologically rich religious worlds.

In other words, the participatory approach presents an enactive<sup>4</sup> understanding of the sacred that conceives spiritual phenomena, experiences, and insights as *cocreated events*. By locating the emergence of spiritual knowing at the interface of human multidimensional cognition, cultural context, subtle worlds, and the deep generativity of life or the cosmos, this account avoids both the secular post/modernist reduction of religion to cultural-linguistic artifact and, as discussed below, the religionist dogmatic privileging of a single tradition as superior or paradigmatic.

The rest of this section introduces eight distinctive features of the participatory approach—spiritual cocreation, creative spirituality, spiritual individuation, participatory pluralism, relaxed spiritual universalism, participatory epistemology, the integral *bodhisattva* vow, and participatory spiritual practice—which other chapters in this book discuss in greater detail.

### *Dimensions of Spiritual Cocreation*

Spiritual cocreation has three interrelated dimensions—intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal.<sup>5</sup> These dimensions respectively establish participatory spirituality as embodied (spirit within), relational (spirit in-between), and enactive (spirit beyond), discussed below (see Table 1.1, page 12).

*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 *equiprimacy principle*, according to which no human attribute is intrinsically superior or more evolved than any other. As Romero and Albareda (2001) pointed out, the cognicentric (i.e., mind-centered) character of Western culture hinders the maturation of nonmental attributes, making it normally necessary to engage in intentional practices to bring these attributes up to the same developmental level the mind achieves through mainstream education (see chapters 4 and 5). In principle, however, 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 the mystery here on Earth, and can also be equally alienated from it. The main challenges to intrapersonal cocreation are cognicentrism, lopsided development, mental pride, and disembodied attitudes to spiritual growth. Possible antidotes to those challenges are the integral *bodhisattva* vow (see below and chapter 3), integral practices (see chapter 4), the cultivation of mental humility (see chapter 5), and

**Table 1.1. A Map of Participatory Spirituality**

	Principles	Challenges	Antidotes	Tests	Regulative Goals	Direction
Transpersonal Cocreation	Equiplurality	Disempowerment Indoctrination Spiritual Narcissism Spiritual Materialism <b>Objectivist Spiritualities</b>	Inner Spiritual Authority Right to Inquire Heretical Courage <b>Creative Spiritualities</b>	Egocentrism Test	Openness to SPIRIT BEYOND	
Interpersonal Cocreation	Equipotentiality	Spiritual Pride Spiritual Inflation Isolation Elitist Exclusivism <b>Hierarchical Spiritualities</b>	Spiritual Humility Deep Dialogue Cooperative Spiritual Inquiry <b>Relational Spiritualities</b>	Eco-Social- Political Test	Collaborative Communion with SPIRIT IN-BETWEEN	
Intrapersonal Cocreation	Equiprimacy	Lopsided Development Spiritual Bypassing Dissociation Cognicentrism Mental Pride <b>Discarnated Spiritualities</b>	Integral Practices Mental Humility Integral Bodhisattva Vow <b>Embodied Spiritualities</b>	Dissociation Test	Groundedness in SPIRIT WITHIN	

embodied approaches to spiritual growth (see chapters 3 and 7). Intrapersonal cocreation affirms the importance of being rooted in *spirit within* (i.e., the immanent dimension of the mystery) and renders participatory spirituality essentially *embodied* (cf. Heron, 2006, 2007; Lanzetta, 2008; Washburn, 2003a).

*Interpersonal cocreation* emerges from cooperative relationships among human beings growing as peers in the spirit of solidarity, mutual respect, and constructive confrontation (see chapter 4; Heron, 1998, 2006). It is grounded in the *equipotentiality principle*, according to which “we are all teachers and students” insofar as we are superior and inferior to others in different regards (Bauwens, 2007; Ferrer, Albareda, & Romero, 2004). This principle does not 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 (e.g., Heron, 1998, 2006; Jung, 2009; Rachel, 2013; R. Tarnas, 2006). The main challenges to interpersonal cocreation are spiritual pride, psychospiritual inflation, circumstantial or self-imposed isolation, and adherence to rigidly hierarchical spiritualities. Antidotes to those challenges include collaborative spiritual practice and inquiry (see chapters 4 and 7), intellectual and spiritual humility (see chapter 5), deep dialogue (see chapter 6), and relational and pluralistic approaches to spiritual growth (see chapter 3). 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* (cf. Heron, 1998, 2006; Heron & Lahood, 2008; Lahood, 2010a, 2010b).

*Transpersonal cocreation* refers to dynamic interaction between embodied human beings and the mystery in the bringing forth of spiritual insights, practices, states, and worlds (Ferrer, 2002, 2008). This dimension is grounded in the *equiplurality principle*,<sup>6</sup> according to which there can *potentially* be multiple spiritual enactments that are nonetheless equally holistic and emancipatory.<sup>7</sup> For example, a fully embodied liberation could be equally achieved through Christian incarnation (Barnhart, 2008) or Yogic integration of *purusa* (consciousness) and *prakriti* (nature) (Whicher, 1998); likewise, freedom from self-centeredness at the service

of others can be attained through the cultivation of Mahayana Buddhist *karuna* (compassion) or Christian *agape* (selfless love) in the context of radically different ontologies (Jennings, 1996). This principle frees participatory spirituality from allegiance to any single spiritual system and paves the way for a genuine, ontologically and pragmatically grounded, spiritual pluralism. The main challenges to transpersonal cocreation are spiritual disempowerment, indoctrination, spiritual narcissism, and adherence to naive objectivist or universalist spiritualities. Antidotes include the development of one's inner spiritual authority and the affirmation of the right to inquire (Heron, 1998, 2006), heretical courage (Cupitt, 1998; Sells, 1994), and enactive and creative spiritualities (Ferrer, 2002; Ferrer & Sherman, 2008b). Transpersonal cocreation affirms the importance of being open to *spirit beyond* (i.e., the subtle dimensions of the mystery) and makes participatory spirituality fundamentally inquiry-driven (Heron, 1998, 2001, 2006) and *enactive* (Ferrer, 2000b, 2002, 2008; Ferrer & Sherman, 2008a).

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 spiritual forms already enacted in history that display more fixed forms and dynamics (e.g., cosmological motifs, archetypal configurations, mystical visions and states), attention to the body and its vital energies may grant greater access to the more generative immanent power of life or the mystery (Ferrer, 2002; Ferrer & Sherman, 2008a). From this approach, it follows, 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.

### *A Creative Spirituality*

In the infancy of participatory spirituality in the 1990s, spiritual inquiry operated within certain constraints arguably inherited from traditional religion. As Eliade (1959/1989) argued, many established religious practices and rituals are "re-enactive" in their attempt to replicate cosmogonic actions and events. Expanding this account, I have suggested that most religious traditions can be seen as "reproductive" insofar as their practices aim to not only ritually reenact mythical motives, but also replicate the enlightenment of their founder or attain the state of salvation or freedom described in allegedly revealed scriptures (see chapter 3).

Although disagreements about the exact nature of such states and the most effective methods to attain them abound in the historical development of religious ideas and practices—naturally leading to rich creative developments within the traditions—spiritual inquiry was regulated (and arguably constrained) by such pre-given unequivocal goals.

Participatory enactment entails a model of spiritual engagement that does not simply reproduce certain tropes according to a given historical *a priori*, but rather embarks upon the adventure of openness to the novelty and creativity of nature or the mystery (Ferrer, 2002; Ferrer & Sherman, 2008a; Heron, 2001, 2006). Grounded on current moral intuitions and cognitive competences, for instance, participatory spiritual inquiry can not only undertake the critical revision and actualization of prior religious forms, but also the cocreation of novel spiritual understandings, practices, and even expanded states of freedom (see chapters 3 and 9).

### *Spiritual Individuation*

This emphasis in creativity is central to *spiritual individuation*, that is, the process through which a person gradually develops and embodies her unique spiritual identity and wholeness. Religious traditions tend to promote the homogenization of central features of the inner and outer lives of their practitioners, for example, encouraging them to seek the same spiritual states and liberation, to become like Christ or the Buddha, or to wear the same clothes (in the case of monks). These aspirations may have been historically legitimate, but after the emergence of the modern self (C. Taylor, 1989), our current predicament (at least in the West) arguably calls for an integration of spiritual maturation and psychological individuation that will likely lead to a richer diversity of spiritual expressions (see chapters 9 and 10). In other words, the participatory approach aims at the emergence of a human community formed by spiritually differentiated individuals.

It is important to sharply distinguish between the modern hyper-individualistic mental ego and the participatory selfhood forged in the sacred fire of spiritual individuation. Whereas the disembodied modern self is plagued by alienation, dissociation, and narcissism, a spiritually individuated person has an embodied, integrated, connected, and permeable identity whose high degree of differentiation, far from being isolating, actually allows him or her to enter into a deeply conscious communion with others, nature, and the multidimensional cosmos. A key difference between modern individualism and spiritual individuation is

thus the integration of radical relatedness in the later. Similarly, Almaas (1988, 1996) distinguished between the narcissistic ego of modern individualism and an essential personhood or individual soul that integrates autonomy and relatedness; for a discussion of the differences between Almaas's individual soul and the spiritually individuated participatory self, see Appendix 1.

### *Participatory Pluralism*

The participatory approach embraces a pluralistic vision of spirituality that accepts the formative role of contextual and linguistic factors in religious phenomena, while simultaneously recognizing the importance of nonlinguistic variables (e.g., somatic, imaginal, energetic, subtle, archetypal) in shaping religious experiences and meanings, and affirming the ontological value and creative impact of spiritual worlds.

Participatory pluralism allows the conception of a multiplicity of not only spiritual paths, but also spiritual liberations, worlds, and even ultimates. On the one hand, besides affirming the historical existence of multiple spiritual goals or “salvations” (Ferrer, 2002; Heim, 1995), the increased embodied openness to immanent spiritual life and the spirit-in-between fostered by the participatory approach may naturally engender a number of novel holistic spiritual realizations that cannot be reduced to traditional states of enlightenment or liberation. If human beings were regarded as *unique* embodiments of the mystery, would it not be plausible to consider that as they spiritually individuate, their spiritual realizations might also be distinct even if potentially overlapping and aligned with each other?

On the other hand, participatory pluralism proposes that different spiritual ultimates can be enacted through intentional or spontaneous participation in an undetermined mystery, spiritual power, or generative force of life or reality. Whereas I take these enactments to be ultimate in their respective spiritual universes, this consideration in no way relativizes the various traditions' ultimates—nor does it posit a supra-ultimate spiritual referent beyond them. In contrast, I hold that participatory enactment allows one to not only move away from representational and objectivist accounts of spiritual cognition, but also avoid the problematic *dualism of the mystery and its enactments*.<sup>8</sup> Hence, the participatory perspective does not contend that there are two, three, or any limited quantity of pregiven spiritual ultimates, but rather that the radical openness, interrelatedness, and creativity of the mystery or the cosmos allows for the participatory

cocreation of an indefinite number of ultimate self-disclosures of reality and corresponding religious worlds.<sup>9</sup> Participatory approaches, that is, seek to enact with body, mind, heart, and consciousness a creative spirituality that lets a thousand spiritual flowers bloom.

### *A More Relaxed Spiritual Universalism*

The pluralistic spirit of the participatory approach should not eclipse its “more relaxed” spiritual universalism—although eschewing dubious equations among spiritual ultimates (e.g., the Tao is God or Buddhist emptiness is structurally equivalent to the Hindu Brahman), the participatory approach affirms an underlying undetermined mystery or creative spiritual power as the generative source of all spiritual enactments (Ferrer, 2002, 2008). This shared spiritual dynamism should be distinguished from any Kantian-like noumenon or “thing-in-itself” endowed with inscrutable qualities and from which all spiritual ultimates are always incomplete, culturally conditioned, or cognitively constrained phenomenal manifestations (e.g., Hick, 1989). In contrast, the enactive epistemology of the participatory approach does away with the Kantian two-worlds dualism by refusing to conceive of the mystery as having objectifiable pregiven attributes (such as personal, impersonal, dual, or nondual) and by affirming the radical identity of the manifold spiritual ultimates and the mystery, even if the former do not exhaust the ontological possibilities of the latter. Put simply, the mystery cocreatively unfolds in multiple ontological directions (see chapter 9 and Postscript).

Moreover, the relationship between pluralism and universalism cannot be consistently characterized in a hierarchical fashion, because while there are “lower” and “higher” forms of both universalism and pluralism (e.g., more or less rigid, sophisticated, encompassing, explanatory), “*the dialectic between universalism and pluralism, between the One and the Many, displays what it may well be the deepest dynamics of the self-disclosing of the mystery*” (Ferrer, 2002, p. 191). In a similar vein, Puhakka (2008) offered some important reflections on the dialectic between “unity vs. diversity” (p. 8) in the context of the historical evolution of transpersonal discourse, with which I fully concur.

### *Participatory Epistemology and Critical Theory*

It cannot be stressed strongly enough that participatory pluralism does not entail the uncritical or relativistic endorsement of past or present

religious understandings or forms of life. Put differently, the participatory rejection of an objectifiable pre-given spiritual ultimate referent does not prevent qualitative distinctions in spiritual matters. To be sure, like beautiful porcelains made out of amorphous clay, traditions cannot be qualitatively ranked according to their accuracy in representing some imagined (accessible or inaccessible) original template. However, this account does not mean discernment cannot be cultivated regarding more (or less) evocative, skillful, or sophisticated artifacts.

In addition, whereas the participatory turn renders meaningless the postulation of qualitative distinctions among traditions according to a priori doctrines or a prearranged hierarchy of spiritual insights, these comparative grounds can be sought in a variety of practical fruits (e.g., existential, cognitive, emotional, interpersonal). Specifically, I have 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 (Ferrer, 2002, 2008; see also chapters 9 and 10). Given the many abuses and oppressions perpetuated in the name of religion, it may be sensible to add an *eco-socio-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 (cf. Heron, 2006).<sup>10</sup>

Two important qualifications must be made regarding these guidelines: First, some spiritual paths and liberations may be more adequate for different psychological and cultural dispositions (as well as for the same individual at distinct developmental junctures), but this does not make them universally superior or inferior. The well-known four yogas of Hinduism (reflection, devotion, action, and experimentation) come quickly to mind in this regard, as do other spiritual typologies that can be found in other traditions (Beena, 1990; H. Smith, 1994). Second, the participatory emphasis on overcoming narcissism and self-centeredness, although arguably central to most spiritual traditions, may not be shared by all. Even more poignantly, most religious traditions would likely not rank too highly in terms of the dissociation or the eco-socio-political tests; for example, gross or subtle forms of repression, control, or strict regulation of the human body and its vital/sexual energies (vs. the promotion of their autonomous maturation, integration, and participation in spiritual knowing) are rather the norm in most past and present contem-

plative endeavors (see chapter 3). Likewise, many religions have had a demonstrably negative environmental impact (e.g., L. E. Nelson, 1998a); supported violence, militarism, and authoritarian regimes (Juergensmeyer, 2000; Victoria, 2006); and brought about serious violations of human rights (Ghanea-Hercock, 2010) even though they have also provided vital resources to secure them (Banchoff & Wuthnow, 2011). Thus, the integrative and socially engaged thrust of the participatory turn is foundational for the development of a participatory critical theory of religion.

More positively, these tests normatively point toward the universal ideal of a *socially responsible integrated selflessness*, which (although the attainability of a fully integrated selflessness is open to question) can act as a regulative principle à la Habermas's (1984) "ideal speech situation." The idea of integrated selflessness is thus capable of providing procedural criteria for critical discernment in spiritual matters, that is, concerning how qualitative distinctions in spiritual discourse might be made. From this evaluative principle, applicable standards, rules, or tests to assess spiritual choices and practices can be derived. In addition to self- and peer-assessment (e.g., Heron, 1996, 1998), one might consider the use of standardized tests such as the Narcissistic Personality Inventory or NPI (Raskin & Terry, 1988). In addition, the thoughtful combination of other tests may indicate the degree of psychosomatic integration of spiritual states, for example measures of transcendence (e.g., Akyalcin, Greenway, & Milne, 2008; Friedman, 1983) used with measures of body intelligence and awareness (e.g., Anderson, 2006).

To sum up, the emancipatory epistemology of the participatory approach assesses spiritual paths according to the degree to which they foster both an overcoming of self-centeredness and a fully embodied integration. These two attributes make individuals 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 the mystery calls them to be.

### *Integral Bodhisattvas*

Since the conscious mind is the seat of most individuals' sense of identity, an exclusive liberation of consciousness can be deceptive insofar as one can believe that one is fully free when, in fact, essential dimensions of the self are underdeveloped, alienated, or in bondage—as the dysfunctional sexual behavior of numerous modern spiritual teachers attest (e.g., Butler, 1990; Edelstein, 2011; Kripal, 2002). As discussed

above, participatory spirituality seeks to foster the harmonious engagement of all human attributes in the spiritual path without tensions or dissociations. Despite his downplaying the spiritual import of sexuality and the vital world, Sri Aurobindo (2001) was correct when he wrote that the liberation of consciousness cannot be equated to an integral transformation entailing the spiritual alignment of all human dimensions (pp. 942ff).

With this in mind, I have proposed an integral *bodhisattva* vow in which the conscious mind renounces its own 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 (Ferrer, 2006, 2007). Needless to say, 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. Likewise, as the above description reflects, my use of the term *bodhisattva* does not suggest a commitment to early Buddhist accounts of liberation as extinction of bodily senses and desires and release from the cycle of transmigratory experience (*samsara*; S. Collins, 1998; P. Harvey, 1995; see also chapters 3 and 9).

### *Participatory Spiritual Practice*

In addition to many classical spiritual skills and values (e.g., mindfulness, compassion, or unconditional love), participatory spiritual practice cultivates the embodied, relational, and enactive (i.e., creative, inquiry-driven, and world-constituting) dimensions of spiritual cocreation. This emphasis can be found in some traditional practices, many contemporary revisions of traditional practices, and a number of innovative spiritual developments. Examples include the following. Whereas some traditional practices (e.g., kabbalistic, contemplative, Indigenous, esoteric) are participatory in many regards (see Ferrer & Sherman, 2008b; Lahood, 2007a), in their modern (re-)articulations one can find more explicit and robust affirmations of participatory values. In this context I locate, for example, Ray's (2008) embodied reconstruction of Buddhist meditation and Rothberg's (2006, 2008) relational expansion of Buddhist practice, contemporary postural yoga (Horton, 2012; Singleton, 2010) and Whicher's (1998) integrative account of Patanjali's yoga, modern Eastern and Western approaches to Tantra (Urban, 2003), and

Schroeder's (1995) and Vennard's (1998) engagements of the body and sexuality in Christian prayer, among many others.

In addition, the last few decades have witnessed the emergence of a variety of novel participatory spiritual practices, such as Albareda and Romero's interactive embodied meditations (see chapter 4), Heron's (1998, 2006) cooperative spiritual inquiry, and my own Embodied Spiritual Inquiry (see chapter 7; Osterhold, Husserl, & Nicol, 2007), which was also proposed as an effective method to foster the integration of spiritual experience (Bailey & Arthur, 2011). Other bodies of practice with important participatory elements include Grof's Holotropic Breathwork (S. Grof & C. Grof, 2010), Almaas's (2002, 2014) Diamond Approach, feminist and women spirituality approaches (e.g., Eller, 1993; T. King, 1992), modern forms of entheogenic spiritual inquiry (e.g., Bache, 2000; Ball, 2008), Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga (Mukherjee, 2003), some contemporary somatic approaches (e.g., D. Johnson, 1995), relational approaches to spirituality (e.g., Achterberg & Rothberg, 1998; Bauwens, 2007; Lahood, 2010a; Welwood, 2000), and modern engagements of sexuality as spiritual path (e.g., Bonheim, 1997; Wade, 2004), among others. With this outline of participatory spirituality established, the discussion now turns to understandings of the participatory approach in the field of transpersonal studies.

#### THE PARTICIPATORY APPROACH: MODEL, ORIENTATION, PARADIGM, OR EPOCH?

To date, transpersonal scholars have understood the participatory approach in three main ways: as a disciplinary model, theoretical orientation or perspective, and paradigm or paradigmatic epoch. This section briefly examines each case.

##### *Disciplinary Model*

The participatory approach is considered a theoretical model within the discipline of transpersonal psychology. In *Shadow, Self, Spirit*, for example, M. Daniels (2005) included the participatory approach as one of the chief theories or models in the field, together with Maslow's metamotivational theory, Jung's analytical psychology, Assagioli's psychosynthesis, Grof's holotropic model, Sri Aurobindo's integral psychology, Wilber's structural-hierarchical model, Washburn's spiral-dynamic model, and Wright's feminist theory. After discussing some major differences

among these models (e.g., on immanence, transcendence, or the self), M. Daniels aligned his own perspective with Sri Aurobindo's and the spiral-dynamic and participatory models, highlighting their convergence in the affirmation of an embodied, integrative spirituality. Other scholars who have referred to the participatory approach as transpersonal or spiritual model include Almendro (2004), M. King (2009), Péter (2009), and Friedman, Krippner, Riebel, & Johnson (2010).

### *Theoretical Orientation*

In addition, the participatory approach is understood as a larger theoretical orientation or perspective transcending the disciplinary boundaries of psychology and operating in a variety of transpersonal disciplines (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993), a multidisciplinary transpersonal orientation (Boucoulas, 1999), or even beyond the boundaries of transpersonal studies (e.g., Ferrer & Sherman, 2008b; Lahood, 2007a). In this spirit, Washburn (2003b) described three major transpersonal theoretical orientations—structural-hierarchical (Wilber), spiral-dynamic (Washburn), and participatory (Ferrer)—noting that the participatory orientation challenges the other two in their claims to exclusive or complete spiritual truth.<sup>11</sup> Washburn also discussed feminist and ecological approaches, but suggested that they are perspectives “defined more in terms of a particular focus of inquiry (women spirituality, the sacredness of nature) than in terms of a theoretical orientation that would guide inquiry” (p. 3). As perspectives, feminism and ecology can be equally applied by advocates of the structural, dynamic, and participatory orientations.

Similarly, Goddard (2005, 2009) identified three major theoretical orientations in the field: neo-perennialist (Wilber), neo-Jungian (Washburn), and pluralistic-participatory (R. Tarnas, Ferrer), which neatly correspond to Washburn's categorization. In contrast to Washburn (2003b), however, Goddard included feminist, ecological, and shamanic perspectives within the participatory orientation. Goddard's work seeks to reconcile the differences among these orientations through the development of an archetypal integrative model, to which I return below. Finally, Cunningham (2011a) described the participatory approach as a transpersonal theoretical orientation located in-between the perennial philosophy at one end of the continuum and empirical scientific approaches based upon mechanist, materialistic, and reductionist assumptions at the other end.

*Paradigm or Paradigmatic Epoch*

The participatory turn has also been understood as a paradigm or paradigmatic epoch. *Revisioning* introduced the participatory approach as a “participatory turn” in transpersonal and spiritual studies—a paradigmatic shift breaking with transpersonal theory’s prevalent epistemological strategies (inner empiricism) and ontological assumptions (perennialism). In the foreword to *Revisioning*, R. Tarnas (2002) offered a powerful paradigmatic account of the participatory approach, framing it as the second conceptual stage of the paradigm shift initiated by Maslow’s and Grof’s launching of the discipline of transpersonal psychology. In this regard, R. Tarnas wrote:

If the founding works of transpersonal psychology by Maslow and Grof constituted its declaration of independence, then this book may well be seen as its emancipation proclamation, its “new birth of freedom.” For here transpersonal theory is liberated from that mortgage to the past, those constraining assumptions and principles inherited from its Enlightenment and modern scientific origins. (p. xv)

Other authors who have written about the participatory turn as a conceptual revolution include Kripal (2003), Jaenke (2004), and C. Clarke (2009).

Building on R. Tarnas’s (2002) proposal, the transpersonal anthropologist Lahood (2007a) described two turns in transpersonal scholarship. The first began with the birth of transpersonal psychology in the late 1960s and can be defined as “an attempt to integrate psychologies East and West; an attempt to map the farthest shores of consciousness . . . ; and the merging of pragmatic science and spiritual concerns” (2). Lahood characterized this turn with a commitment to religious universalism (or perennialism) and included the work of Maslow, Grof, & Wilber as representative. The second turn is the participatory one (as exemplified by Lahood in the works of R. Tarnas, Heron, & Ferrer), which represents a departure from transpersonal psychology’s allegiance to perennialism and emphasizes the embodied, relational, and pluralistic dimensions of transpersonal events. In this regard, Hartelius, Harrahy, Crouch, Thouin, & Stamp (forthcoming) situated the participatory perspective within a wider second-wave transpersonalism that stresses the

embodied, embedded, diverse, and transformative aspects of transpersonal psychology.

In a subsequent essay, Lahood (2008) extended this account into three paradigmatic epochs of transpersonalism. Epoch one is the *pre-transpersonal movement* or “psychedelic revolution” of the 1960s and 1970s, leading to the hybridization of Eastern spirituality and entheogenic states and culminating with Maslow’s and Grof’s formalization of the movement. Epoch two, the *neo-perennial era*, goes from 1977 to the mid-1990s and is dominated by Wilber’s work, which seeks to integrate Western and Eastern philosophy, psychology, and religion into an evolutionary framework structured according to a supposedly universal teleological process whose ultimate aim is an integral nondual realization. Epoch three, the *participatory turn*, begins in the early 1990s with R. Tarnas’s (1991) analysis of Grof’s consciousness research and is formalized in the writings of Heron (1992, 1998, 2006) and Ferrer (2002), both of whom Lahood named as articulating cogent alternatives to transpersonal neo-perennialism.

Similarly, Dale (2014) situated the “pluralistic-participatory movement” (108) as the prevalent growing force (*agglomeration*, in his term) in transpersonal scholarship in the twenty-first century, after Wilber’s hierarchical neo-perennialism and the East-West synthesis of the 1960s and 1970s that spawned the birth of transpersonal psychology. According to Dale, only the pluralistic-participatory movement correlates with the nonlinear paradigm in contemporary science (i.e., moving beyond mainstream psychology’s linear statistical averaging), which provides the best explanation of transpersonal inquiry and development. Although participatory pluralism “is yet to arrive at its period of greatest influence” (116), Dale stated, “a chronological ascendancy in period of dominance is also a striking characteristic of the agglomerations identified” (*ibid.*).<sup>12</sup>

In addition, Dale (2014) distinguished between empirical-positivist and participatory/non-Cartesian research approaches in transpersonal psychology. According to Dale, *empirical positivism* derives from analytical philosophy and is linked to the empirical work of Transcendental Meditation (TM) researchers (e.g., Alexander, Heaton, & Chandler, 1994) and Wilber’s (2000c, 2006) transpersonal approach, while *participatory non-Cartesianism* stems from continental philosophy and is associated with the work of Heron (1992, 2006), R. Tarnas (1991), Ferrer (2002), and Hartelius (Hartelius, 2006; Hartelius & Ferrer, 2013), among others. In an important paper, Cunningham (2015) elaborated further on these two transpersonal epistemic cultures.

Whereas it may be valid to conceive the participatory approach as disciplinary model, theoretical orientation, research approach, or even conceptual revolution (or paradigm), my sense is that epochal claims may have been premature. It is one thing to argue that the participatory approach is an increasingly prevailing perspective or that it represents a conceptual revolution with regard to prior transpersonal theorizing—it is quite another to claim that it inaugurated a new paradigmatic era in transpersonal thinking. Before entertaining this possibility seriously, a thorough analysis of the actual impact of participatory thought on transpersonal scholarship seems necessary. The next section begins to explore the scope of such an influence.

### THE IMPACT OF THE PARTICIPATORY TURN

Participatory perspectives in philosophy, religion, and the human sciences predate the publication of *Revisioning* and any possible influence of my work should be seen in this larger context.<sup>13</sup> Before reviewing the impact of the participatory approach, it is helpful to note the relationship of mutual inclusivity between transpersonal theory and the participatory turn. On the one hand, as discussed above, the participatory approach can be seen as a theoretical model, orientation, or paradigm within the field of transpersonal studies. On the other hand, transpersonal studies is only one among other scholarly disciplines—such as anthropology (Lahood, 2007c), Indigenous studies (Bastien & Kremer, 2004; Marks, 2007), or comparative mysticism (Ferrer & Sherman, 2008b; Freeman, 2007)—impacted by the participatory turn. That said, this section follows the footprints of the participatory perspective in four bodies of knowledge: transpersonal studies, consciousness studies, integral and holistic education, and religious studies.<sup>14</sup>

#### *Transpersonal and Integral Studies*

In recent years an increasing number of transpersonal and integral scholars have aligned their works in varying degrees with different aspects of the participatory approach. I locate here, in chronological order, the works of Heron (1998, 2001, 2006), R. Tarnas (2001, 2006), Jaenke (2004), Paulson (2004), M. Daniels (2005), O'Connor (2005), Hollick (2006), Hartelius (2006, 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Hartelius & Ferrer, 2013), Bauwens (2007), Kremer (2007), Lahood (2007b, 2007c), Irwin (2008), Kelly (2008), Lancaster (2008), Rothberg (2008), Sherman (2008; Ferrer

& Sherman, 2008a), Alderman (2011, 2012a, 2012b), Rachel (2013), Segall (2013), R. S. Brown (2013), Brooks, Ford, & Huffman (2013), Cabot (2014, 2015), Dale (2014), and Cunningham (2015), and S. Taylor (2017), among others.<sup>15</sup>

In general, *Revisioning* is often credited with freeing transpersonal thinking from the constraints of Wilber's neo-perennialism and associated hierarchical rankings of spiritual traditions, states, and orientations (e.g., Jaenke, 2004; Lahood, 2007b; Lancaster, 2004; R. Tarnas, 2001), as well as for articulating a more embodied, relational, and pluralistic approach to spiritual growth and understanding (e.g., Dale, 2014; M. Daniels, 2005, 2009; Heron, 2006; Lahood, 2008). As Lahood (2007a) pointed out, many scholars in the field adapted the participatory use of the language of events (vs. experiences) to refer to transpersonal phenomena (e.g., Irwin, 2008; Kremer, 2007; G. Palmer & Hastings, 2013; Wade, 2004). Likewise, my participatory approach to spiritual diversity and pragmatic emancipatory epistemology are endorsed in many transpersonal works (e.g., Alderman, 2011, 2012a, 2012b; Dale, 2014; Friedman et al., 2010; Hollick, 2006; Lancaster, 2004).

This spread of participatory thinking has begun to affect Wilber's writing and that of his colleagues and critics alike. Despite Wilber's (2002) early dismissal of *Revisioning* as expressing "a green-meme approach to spirituality" (see below), his most recent work (Wilber, 2006) incorporates a number of participatory insights and constructions. As M. Daniels (in Rowan, Daniels, Fontana, & Walley, 2009) indicated, for example, the cocreated nature of the spiritual path, the language of participation, and the use of the myth of the given in spiritual critical discourse are central features of the participatory approach introduced in my early work (e.g., Ferrer, 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2002). Although Wilber has assimilated aspects of the participatory approach into his integral theory, from a participatory perspective many problems remain (see chapter 9; Hartelius, 2015a, 2015b; Hartelius & Ferrer, 2013). Furthermore, in a series of important essays, Alderman (2011, 2012a, 2012b) offered the most successful attempt yet to reconcile Wilberian and participatory perspectives on enaction and spiritual pluralism. DiPerna (2012) coined the term *participatory integration* to name the paradigm shift necessary to develop a Wilberian-integral approach to religious studies. Other integral scholars employing participatory ideas in their theorizing include McIntosh (2007), who used *Revisioning's* enactive approach and epistemological critique to elaborate a more pluralistic "integral reality framework" that seeks to counter some of the problems of Wilber's model, and

Ferendo (2007), who presented the participatory perspective on integral practice (see chapter 4) as complementary to Wilber's approach.

In the rest of this section, I illustrate various ways in which the participatory perspective has been engaged in transpersonal works through three examples. Firstly, in *The Science of Oneness*, Hollick (2006) proposed the adoption of Heron's (1996, 1998) cooperative inquiry to produce reliable inner knowledge, and devoted two chapters to argue that Heron's and Ferrer's participatory approaches lay the foundations for "a new, inclusive and holistic model of spirituality that speaks to the spirit of our age" (p. 345). For Hollick, participatory spirituality not only accommodates the diversity of spiritualities better than other models, but also stresses embodied, ethical, cocreative, relational, and cooperative dimensions of the spiritual path that he considers crucial in our times. The emerging "holistic model of human spirituality" (352), Hollick concluded, should be able to

draw upon the ancient wisdom of the shamanic, polytheistic, monotheistic and transcendent religious traditions; welcome the devotional, intellectual, detached, engaged, solitary, social, exoteric, esoteric, transcendent, immanent and other spiritual paths; and embrace the cocreative, participatory view of our relationship with Spirit. (pp. 352–353)

Secondly, Lahood (2007a) edited two issues of the journal *ReVision* to explore the emergence of a participatory worldview in transpersonal studies, anthropology, Indigenous studies, and ecopsychology, among other disciplines. With the title, *The Participatory Turn, Part 1 and 2*, the *ReVision* monographs not only engage extensively with my own work, but also include significant participatory developments by authors such as R. Tarnas (2007), Heron (2007), Kremer (2007), Abram (2007), Lahood (2007b, 2007c), Bauwens (2007), Conner (2007), and Marks (2007).

Finally, M. Daniels (2009; see also M. Daniels 2013) proposed that the participatory perspective represents a third vector (which he calls "extending") in transpersonal development beyond the standard "ascending" (i.e., geared to otherworldly transcendence) and "descending" (i.e., geared to this-worldly immanence) ones. M. Daniels argued that previous formulations of the "descending" current tended to conflate two fundamentally distinct perspectives: depth psychological, whose focus is the exploration and integration of unconscious material (e.g., Jung, Washburn, Grof), and relational-participatory, which stresses the spiritual connection

with others and the world. “Such relational, participatory thinking,” he wrote, “is exemplified in Indigenous spiritualities, feminist spirituality (e.g., the connected self), transpersonal ecology (ecocentrism), relational spiritualities, and Ferrer’s (e.g., 2002) participatory vision (emancipation from self-centeredness, cocreative participation)” (97). M. Daniels (2009) concluded by making a strong case for the import of an “all-vector” transpersonal theory and practice; after surveying a number of spiritual models, he highlighted the participatory approach and Sri Aurobindo’s integral yoga as the two spiritual orientations conferring equal prominence to all three vectors (ascending, descending, and extending).

I close this section by noting the growing presence of the participatory perspective in related fields such as Gestalt-transpersonal therapy (Lahood, 2015; L. Williams, 2006), psychosynthesis (Faith, 2007; H. Palmer & Hubbard, 2009), enneagram studies (Bailey & Arthur, 2011), Jungian psychology (Ianiszewski, 2010), archetypal cosmology (B. Tarnas, 2016), imaginal psychology (Voss, 2009), relational psychoanalysis (R. S. Brown, 2016), resource focused counseling and psychotherapy (Wilson, 2017), addiction recovery (Eng, 2016), ecopsychology (W. W. Adams, 2010a, 2010b; H. Walker, 2012), classical singing (Freinkel, 2015), occupational science (M. Collins, 2010), and relational and peer-to-peer approaches to spiritual growth (Bauwens, 2007; Heron, 2006; Lahood, 2010a, 2010b).

### *Consciousness Studies*

The participatory perspective is also present in certain scholarly sites dedicated to the study of consciousness. In 2006 Anthony Freeman, managing editor of the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, published a provocative essay in this journal arguing that, in light of the participatory critique of a subtle Cartesianism in transpersonal theory (Ferrer, 2002), Dennett’s heterophenomenology (an agnostic third-person approach to first-person experiential reports) should be welcomed as the most coherent and suitable methodology for transpersonal psychology (Freeman, 2006). Freeman’s essay triggered a lively debate on the epistemological status of transpersonal psychology, the nature of transpersonal inquiry, and appropriate methods for the study of human consciousness, with responses by Tart (2006), W. A. Adams (2006), and Hartelius (2006)—the latter of which, in my view, provides the most effective rejoinder to Freeman’s claims. For an important related paper, see Walach & Runehov (2010).