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Marcie Boucouvalas, JTP Editor
Dept. of Human Development, VA Tech/ National Capital Region
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Books for Review
Send to Arthur Hastings, JTP Book Review Editor
Institute for Transpersonal Psychology (now Sofia University),
1069 East Meadow Circle, Palo Alto, CA 94303

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Christina Grof
1941-2014

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EDITOR’S NOTE

The year 2014 has been one of transitions for the transpersonal community. We noted and honored the passing of several key contributors to the transpersonal movement in our last issue, including our long time Book Review Editor and transpersonal pioneer, Arthur Claude Hastings, to whom Volume 46(1), 2014 was dedicated. As the issue went to press, however, we also learned of and announced the sudden passing of Christina Grof and alerted readers that a tribute article honoring her life would appear in the next issue. Embracing that feat, Karey Pohn opens this issue of the Journal with a deeply reflective review of Christina’s life path, her far-reaching contributions, including her struggles and how she used such experiences to help others. Also integrated into her article is an introductory review of Christina’s most recently published book, Eggshell Landing: Love, death, and forgiveness in Hawaii, boxes of which arrived to her home shortly before her passing.

Diana Raab, a first time author with the Journal, has engaged five well respected memoir writers in illuminating the transpersonal dimensions and potential of the process, particularly when inspired by a transcendent or pivotal experience as was the case, per her selection criterion, with all participants in the study. As a memoir writer herself, Raab carefully reviewed and read their writings in depth prior to “partnering” with each in a narrative inquiry. As an added dimension, all of her “co-researchers” agreed for their identities to be known to readers.

Two veteran authors offer articles that deepen and diversify their trajectories of inquiry.

Building upon his earlier work as a foundation, Jorge Ferrer tackles a major issue in transpersonal scholarship: the matter and meaning of scientific inquiry. Concerned with what he views as a seeming naturalistic/supernatural bifurcation reflected in the writings of some authors in the transpersonal literature, he argues for abandoning such terms and opting for a more “open naturalism,” which would include subtle dimensions and a recognition of where modern science might be useful but where and in what ways it is limiting for transpersonal inquiry. In this process, he underscores the value and importance of studying experiential transpersonal dimensions. An article by Gregg Lahood that follows invites readers into his autobiographical transpersonal experience of life changing magnitude that he deftly integrates with a cross spectrum of key orientations and theories in the transpersonal arena. The “visionary events,” as he emphasizes, are used as a source of data. Some readers may benefit from exploring both articles in tandem with each other, especially since Ferrer’s position voices support and an open mind for the kind of data that Lahood is embracing.

Finally, in a research note, Monika Goretzky and Lance Storm (including Michael Thalbourne posthumously) have made a minor improvement to their Spiritual Emergency Scale (SES), published in Volumes 41(1), pp. 81–97 and 45(2), pp. 105–117, that they are offering to our readers.

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We have our own transitions at the journal. I would first like to welcome Linda Morris, who will be working with us in an editorial capacity. Moreover, Lauren Braciodietta, who had assisted Arthur Hastings with the Book Review section, has now stepped up to the plate as Book Review Editor. Her inaugural issue in this capacity is quite full with a broad spectrum of reviews, detailed further below.

Miles A. Vich, a long time editor of this Journal (1975–1999), begins the Book Review section with an essay review of the new comprehensive Handbook of Transpersonal Psychology, edited by Harris Friedman and Glenn Hartelius, while Renn Butler and Valerie Beltran conclude the Review section in offering two different perspectives/reviews on Stanislav Grof’s most recent book: H.R. Giger and the Zeitgeist of the Twentieth Century. Butler offers a title for his review: “The Human Struggle to Be Born: Perinatal Imagery in the Lifework of a Master.”

Four more reviews on various books abound. Jenny Wade emerges with a review she aptly entitled “No Bosses, No Meetings, No Problems!”—for what she considers a groundbreaking book: Reinventing Organizations: A guide to creating organizations inspired by the next stage of human consciousness, authored by Frederic Laloux, with a foreword by Ken Wilber. Stephen Martin, a Jungian analyst by profession for over 30 years, presents a review of Confrontation with the Unconscious: Jungian depth psychology and psychedelic experience, authored Scott J. Hill, which Martin considers “a big book about a thorny issue”: the interface between Jungian depth work and psychedelics and the challenging question(s) as to the possibility of a potential integration. Finally, David Scheel heralds Stuart Sovatsky’s most recent book, Advanced Spiritual Intimacy: The yoga of deep tantric sensuality, as a “master work,” a scholarly as well as practical guide replete with exercises that integrate ancient wisdom with modern practice in deepening intimacy and growth. On a different note, and as a tribute to scholarly dialogue, Sangeetha Menon offers her response to several issues raised by Les Lancaster in his review of her book (Brain, Self, and Consciousness: Explaining the conspiracy of experience) in the last issue—Volume 46(1), 2014.

Note: In another transitionary historic event, during October 2014, our Association for Transpersonal Psychology, along with the International Transpersonal Association, joined EUROTAS (The European Transpersonal Association) to support their 16th annual conference, held on the island of Crete in Greece this year, with the theme of Metamorphosis: Disintegration, Integration, Conscious Living. Hosted and organized by transpersonal scholars and professionals in Greece, led by Lindy/Lydia McMullin, then President of the Greek Transpersonal Association (Synthesis), several of us from the Board of Editors offered keynote and/or other presentations. See www.eurotas2014.com for further exploration.

As always, the Books Our Editors are Reading section, a unique feature of this Journal, not only provides further resources but also keeps readers connected with Board members.

MB
Falls Church, VA USA
REMEMBERING CHRISTINA GROF:
SPIRITUAL SEEKER, PIONEER, TEACHER,
HUMANITARIAN

December 30, 1941–June 15, 2014

Karey Pohn, J.D., Ph.D.
Encinitas, CA
Christina Grof died quietly and unexpectedly June 15th, 2014 at her home in Mill Valley, CA, and the transpersonal community lost a splendid and sensitive soul. When I look back on the life of this intrepid experiential transpersonal pioneer, I am reminded of the poet Rainer Maria Rilke’s quote from Letters to a Young Poet:

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer. (1993, p. 35)

Christina Grof did indeed bravely and fully live and love the questions, and more importantly she shared her profound life and struggles generously and publically with the world, in the hope of helping others.

Christina grew up in Hawaii, although she was born in Roanoke, Virginia. When Christina was 4 years old, her biological father left; Christina’s mother remarried, and a couple of years later the family moved to Hawaii. But there was trouble in paradise—a dysfunctional family dynamic ensued, and Christina experienced physical and sexual abuse growing up at the hands of her stepfather.

For as long as she could remember, Christina had a longing for something larger than herself, and she found solace in nature and in the Episcopal Church. The church was a safe place for Christina; it had beautiful music, stained glass, and there was a wonderful Maori minister, Manu Bennett, from New Zealand. However, as Christina grew older, the dogma of the church held little appeal, and instead she focused on literature, mythology and art.

Christina attended Sarah Lawrence College and had the good fortune to have noted mythology teacher Joseph Campbell during her senior year. She became friends with Joseph and his wife Jean Erdman (another Hawaii native), and Campbell would later be instrumental in Christina’s life trajectory. Christina was an extremely creative person and gifted artist and painter, who was also able to teach others.

After college, Christina returned to Hawaii, married a teacher and became an art teacher at a progressive elementary school. Christina got involved with yoga as a form of exercise and became interested in the Lamaze method of natural childbirth. During the delivery of both her son Than in 1968 and her daughter Sarah in 1970, she experienced intense physical symptoms—breathing and shaking uncontrollably, along with white light shooting up her spine and exploding in her head. Having no context for the experience, she thought she was crazy. This was the beginning of what would later be coined by Christina and Stan as a spiritual emergency. But Christina had no roadmap for her experience, and the doctors administered morphine and thorazine to calm down her symptoms.
Christina’s interest in spirituality continued and she went to see Swami Muktananda of the Siddha Yoga tradition, which was then very new and not yet popular in the West. While attending a weekend course in July 1974, at which she received shaktipat, Christina’s spontaneous spiritual emergence was reignited and she began experiencing visions along with the strange breathing and spontaneous movements. A car accident in May of 1975, which included a near death experience, exacerbated these kundalini type experiences further. Christina sought to keep her symptoms under control, but was experiencing many difficulties, and her marriage collapsed under the strain.

In the summer of 1975, Christina then went to the mainland to sort things out in her life, and, on a subsequent trip to New York, she told her friend and teacher Joseph Campbell about her experiences over dinner, recognizing elements of death, birth, rebirth and spirituality. Campbell then promptly told her about his friend Stan Grof at Esalen and made the introduction.

Two weeks later, Christina went to meet Stan at Esalen and attended a six-week workshop, where they fell in love. Later, in the fall of 1975, Christina and Stan began their life together, and went on to marry and live at Esalen where they both taught and hosted thirty month-long workshops. This newfound love came at a cost—Christina lost legal custody of the children in a lawsuit, as their father was an influential member of the community and was declared a better provider. This was very painful for Christina, and, although Christina’s life experience and life work took her in a different direction, she made the most of what time she was able to spend with the children.

In the late 1970s—at a month-long workshop about “Spiritual Experience or Psychosis,” Christina actually began to have another particularly intense episode of spiritual emergency, and in integrating the experience Spiritual Emergency was born. In 1980, Christina founded the Spiritual Emergence Network (SEN) and later co-wrote Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes a Crisis (1989) and The Stormy Search for the Self: A Guide to Personal Growth Through Transformational Crises (1990).

Thus began a lifelong pattern of Christina working on herself, like an alchemist, using the prima materia or lead of her own experience and transforming it through suffering and intense pressure into the philosopher’s stone or gold. Christina’s next challenge was addiction. Her attempt to control her kriyas (spontaneous movements) in situations where she could not work with them, as for example during airline travel, along with a genetic predisposition to alcoholism, led her to turn to alcohol. Her struggle with alcohol and her successful recovery was the subject of her next book in 1993, The Thirst for Wholeness: Attachment, Addiction and the Spiritual Path.

Christina and Stan co-founded the International Transpersonal Association (ITA) and organized many international conferences. Along the way they would meet and host luminaries and friends from Mother Theresa, Ram Dass, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, to Jack Kornfield and John Cleese. These conferences were held all over the world from India, Australia and Europe, and
both of the Americas. These legendary meetings planted seeds that grew worldwide into national transpersonal organizations, most of which continue to this day. Together, during the 38 years of their marriage and collaborative partnership, the Grofs traveled, taught, held conferences, did lectures workshops, and conducted trainings on every continent except for Antarctica.

Because Christina had her feet in both the Transpersonal and Addictions fields, she noticed that the Twelve Step programs had an effective strategy to deal with alcohol and addictions, but there was not a conceptual framework that was really acceptable to academicians and clinicians. In the Transpersonal Psychology field, paradoxically, the situation was the opposite; there was a conceptual framework for spirituality, but no effective strategy to help alcoholics and addicts. Addiction to spirituality (spiritual bypass) was another problem that was often seen in the Transpersonal world. Christina believed that the two different fields should be bridged and the result was the creation of both an Esalen workshop and two ITA conferences entitled “Mystical Quest, Attachment and Addiction,” that were based on her inspiration.

This was another pattern that is present in Christina’s life. Christina was a master at helping people in creative ways, always seeking to bring the best to the table, so to speak. An example was a tradition she created for her own children and their friends—the “Messy Meal.” As a reward for having good table manners at other times, a special meal happened where kids were able to be as wild and creative with their food and food choices as they wanted. These occasions are the source of cherished memories for all who had the privilege of attending! In the same vein, another tradition that Christina instituted and organized was Children’s Day at Esalen each year—a special day each summer was set aside just for the children where games and elaborate treasure hunts were organized, with face painting, music, and special performances all just for the children, although those who were kids at heart were not excluded!

Christina and Stan also jointly created Holotropic Breathwork together at Esalen. Both Stan and Christina have the gift of recognizing and using elements from other traditions and combining them to help people to transform. Both had experienced and seen the power of breathing in transformative work—in psychedelic sessions, Christina’s own yoga and labor experiences, and the use of breath in many other traditions and transformative practices. Stan had used music and mandala drawing in the psychedelic sessions. Christina brought her background as an artist and her musical ear, which she inherited from her father who had been a musician, becoming the music woman. Together they incorporated music and mandala drawing, along with the important concepts of set and setting and the breather/sitter relationship, as key parts of Holotropic Breathwork. Then they created a training program and began to train facilitators. (In 2010, they co-authored Holotropic Breathwork: A New Approach to Self Exploration and Therapy.)

Having suffered for many years from chronic back pain and lupus, a complex and painful autoimmune disease that interfered with her ability to travel and keep up the hectic pace, Christina then began the practice of letting go
professionally. She also had to withdraw from the intense demands of workshops and trainings as well, eventually turning over her beloved music woman role to those whom she had skillfully trained. Although this was a painful process, she focused on finding spirituality in the everyday world and continued her lifelong pursuit of painting and healing. Christina’s strength was in her lived experience and her dedication to valiantly living the questions.

At times, Christina also suffered being in the shadow of Stan’s immense intellect and prolific legacy, and so she has remained a bit of an unsung heroine. Stan himself credited Christina with shining a spotlight on areas he would otherwise never have seen or considered, and for also being at the forefront of these areas and at the memorial service for Christina on October 14th 2014 at Spirit Rock, in Woodacre, California, Stan explained:

Our cooperation was so close that it was not always easy to separate one person’s contributions from the other’s. Unfortunately, because we live in a patriarchal society, Christina often did not receive any credit for projects that she had created single-handedly—such as founding the Spiritual Emergency Network (SEN) or bridging the addictions field and transpersonal psychology—as well as those to which she made substantial contributions—such as Holotropic Breathwork, Esalen month- longs, and international transpersonal conferences. This was further complicated by the fact that, in later years, low energy due to her chronic autoimmune disease did not allow her full participation in many of the events.

Christina received three honorary doctorates during her lifetime and was very happy and excited about the plans for the Stanislav and Christina Grof Foundation and gave her blessing to it. The Foundation is dedicated to preserving, protecting, extending, and showcasing the work of both of these brilliant humanitarians and pioneers, although regrettably Christina did not live to see its formal birth during the October 26th launch and Open Space. As a tribute to Christina, the event was held at The Women’s Building in San Francisco, and during the day people representing all areas of the Grof legacy were in attendance.

In mid May of this year, Stan asked me to read the galleys and review Christina’s latest book The Eggshell Landing: Love, Death and Forgiveness in Hawaii for the Inner Door, a small publication of AHBI (Association for Holotropic Breathwork International). I read the deeply moving book in two sittings and sent the book review to Stan at the end of first week of June. Stan told me that that Christina wasn’t feeling well, but loved the review and would get back to me when she was feeling better. I was so struck by the beauty and courage of her words that I was really excited to talk with her about it. Unfortunately, I never got that chance, as she died a few days later, less than a week after boxes containing the book arrived at her home.

Christina’s book, The Eggshell Landing, bravely and boldly recounts her astonishing story of forgiveness of her stepfather, who had abused her as a child, when she decided to support him in his dying process. “Eggshell landing” is a nautical term that refers to bringing a vessel elegantly and skillfully ashore, so
that it comes within an eggshell’s width of the dock. Christina uses this term as a metaphor for her experience of reconciling with her stepfather.

The book begins shockingly and powerfully with a frankness that is quite refreshing, as Christina owns up to a full spectrum of private thoughts that show her humanity. In this courageous act, Christina allows us to not only be with her, but to have and be with our own feelings without judgment.

Christina takes us seamlessly back and forth from present day to her childhood and back again, like a skilled weaver, shuttling the weft threads across the warp of her life, creating a rich tapestry of great beauty and emotion. An accomplished painter, with an exquisite eye for color, Christina uses her deep creativity and aesthetic sense to paint breathtakingly visual descriptions along the way. We are there with her on every step of this amazing journey.

_The Eggshell Landing_ is a coda to, and provides a context for, _The Thirst for Wholeness_ and _The Stormy Search for the Self_. Like in these two other works, and as in Christina’s life in general, she is very transparent, honest, and candid about her experience.

In this narration of her own holotropic journey of forgiveness, Christina has given us another viscerally compelling lived experience that perhaps, if we are lucky, can lead us to our own eggshell landings of forgiveness. She shows us the tremendous healing that is possible when we have the courage to begin this journey for ourselves.

On the occasion of Christina’s 50th birthday celebration in December of 1991, Roger Walsh succinctly described the nature of Christina’s life’s work to attendees: “I do not know anybody else who—like Christina—has been able to transform his or her personal problems into projects serving humanity.” Despite her physical and emotional challenges, Christina brought a warm related spirituality to everything she did and was inclusive and welcoming. Her creativity infused all aspects of her life and she brought art and beauty into everyday life, especially at the holiday times—and she encouraged others to do the same. Christina’s memorial service in October was filled with touching and amusing stories that revealed her deep caring and at times comical nature.

Last June, with the delivery of this important story Christina finally and quietly made her own Eggshell Landing, having completed a work of great compassion, strength, beauty and power that will no doubt help others on their journeys. Christina is survived by her beloved husband Stanislav, son Than and daughter Sarah, as well as five grandchildren, many close friends and family, along with hundreds of thousands of people whose lives have been and will continue to be touched by her many contributions to humanity.

Below is the epilogue, the closing words from the book, which is her last and perhaps best work:
There will be more to do, more life to live;  
More valleys through which to pass,  
more mountains of joy,  
more hope, more work,  
more struggles, more strength.

But there is a difference now.  
Once, gaping wounds within that tormented daylight and dreams.  
Now those wounds are closed.  
Where they existed, fading scars whisper  
of the wilderness, of the power to endure,  
of love, of Grace.

Fading soul scars are banners of a victimless victory.  
I will not forget, but never again will I be bound  
by the deeds that caused them.

Never.  

REFERENCES


BIBLIOGRAPHY


The Author

Karey Pohn, JD, Ph.D., is a depth psychologist who specializes in the archetypal nature of cultural creations. Stanislav Grof, M.D., was her dissertation chair, and her doctoral work on the archetypal aspects of play follows on from the Cosmic Game, authored by Stanislav Grof. Karey is an adjunct faculty member at the Pacifica Graduate Institute and Antioch University in Los Angeles, California, has served on the board of The Association for Holotropic Breathwork for the past 7 years, and is the Secretary and Treasurer of the Stanislav and Christina Grof Foundation. She is also an executive coach and consultant who helps people to play more, think better, and realize their dreams.
ABSTRACT: This article critically discusses the scientific status of transpersonal psychology and its relation to so-called supernatural claims. In particular, analysis focuses on Friedman’s (2002, 2013a) proposed division of labor between a “scientific” transpersonal psychology and “nonscientific” transpersonal studies. This paper demonstrates that despite Friedman’s aim to detach transpersonal psychology from any particular metaphysical worldview, turning the field into a modern scientific discipline effectively binds transpersonal psychology to a naturalistic metaphysical worldview that is hostile to most spiritual knowledge claims. After identifying several problems with Friedman’s account of science and neo-Kantian skepticism about “supernatural” factors in spiritual events, this paper introduces the perspective of a participatory metaphysical pluralism and considers the challenge of shared spiritual visions for scientific naturalism. Finally, a participatory research program is outlined that bridges the naturalistic/supernaturalistic split by embracing a more liberal or open naturalism—one that is receptive to both the ontological integrity of spiritual referents and the plausibility of subtle dimensions of reality.

KEYWORDS: transpersonal psychology, science, naturalism, reductionism, supernatural, participatory, neo-Kantianism.

Should transpersonal psychology be a scientific discipline? Do transpersonal psychologists need to pledge to the exclusive use of empirical methods in their research and scholarship? A number of contemporary transpersonal scholars have so argued (see Daniels, 2001, 2005; Friedman, 2002, 2013a; MacDonald, 2013). Although with different emphases, they propose that transpersonal psychology should focus on the scientific study of the naturalistic (i.e., physical and psychological) aspects of transpersonal phenomena, staying away from not only supernatural or metaphysical considerations, but also nonempirical approaches such as hermeneutics or contemplative methodologies. Their explicit aim is to free transpersonal psychology from religious ideologies, secure the field’s metaphysical neutrality, and thus enhance its social and academic legitimacy as a scientific discipline.

While I argue against the pursuit of these aims in this article—and in particular against Friedman (2002, 2013a) as their strongest advocate—I also recognize the value of a scientific approach. First, although I have elsewhere critiqued the “empiricist colonization of spirituality” (i.e., the import of empiricist standards such as falsifiability to spiritual inquiry; see Ferrer, 1998, 2002), I also think
that transpersonal psychology would benefit from more scientific studies. To discern the transformative outcomes, neurobiological correlates, and phenomenology of transpersonal events, among other possible empirical findings, is hugely important; quantitative and qualitative approaches should be regarded as equally vital for the field (see Anderson & Braud, 2011, 2013). Second, I agree with Friedman (2002, 2013a) that transpersonal psychology should neither become a religion nor be exclusively tied to any particular spiritual tradition or metaphysical worldview. With this goal in mind, some of my past works sought to expel spiritual ideologies underlying transpersonal models through a participatory framework that does not privilege any spiritual tradition or orientation over others on objectivist, ontological, or metaphysical grounds (i.e., saying that theism, monism, or nondualism corresponds to the nature of ultimate reality). Those writings also offered criteria for making qualitative distinctions regarding spiritual matters, based on pragmatic and transformational grounds such as selflessness, embodied integration, and ecocultural-political justice (Ferrer, 2002, 2008a, 2011a, 2011b). Third, although accounts of the scientific method from the transpersonal defenders of science more closely resemble what one would find in a science textbook than the activities of a practicing scientist, these authors are not naive scientists. Rather, these scholars present a philosophically informed scientific approach that properly acknowledges science as but one path to knowledge, the provisional nature of scientific products, and the hermeneutic dimension of science (i.e., data are theory laden; Friedman, 2002, 2013a; MacDonald, 2013).

In this article, however, I show that the scientific approach can be—and indeed has been—taken too far. I first argue that these scholars (e.g., Daniels, 2001, 2005; Friedman, 2002, 2013a; MacDonald, 2013) underestimate how the powerful ways in which modern science is embedded in a naturalistic metaphysics betray their goal to free the discipline from fidelity to any metaphysical worldview. Then, after identifying serious problems with these authors’ adherence to a neo-Kantian epistemology and associated metaphysical agnosticism, I show the residual scientism afflicting their proposals for a scientific transpersonal psychology. Next, I present the critical metaphysical pluralism of the participatory approach and discuss the challenge of shared spiritual visions for scientific naturalism. Finally, as a possible direction to relax the field’s metaphysical tensions, I offer an example of a participatory research program that bridges the modern dichotomy between naturalism and supernaturalism (though I later argue against the need for either term, they are appropriate when discussing this so-called divide). I conclude by arguing that although transpersonal psychology should encourage scientific studies, the field should not be defined or limited by its allegiance to any single inquiry approach, epistemology, or metaphysical worldview.

**Science, Naturalism, and Metaphysical Agnosticism**

In two important manifestos, Friedman (2002, 2013a) proposed to restrict the term *psychology* to refer to the scientific study of transpersonal phenomena and to use the broader category *transpersonal studies* for nonempirical approaches.
Friedman’s main motivation appears to be detaching transpersonal psychology from specific metaphysical worldviews, such as those espoused by religious traditions. Because metaphysical statements cannot be empirically tested, Friedman argued, a scientific transpersonal psychology should remain agnostic about metaphysical and supernatural claims and concentrate instead on the naturalistic study of the physical and the psychological (cf. McDonald, 2013).

Leaving aside the circularity of this argument, a more serious issue emerges when considering that, as generally understood and practiced in modern times, science entails a naturalistic metaphysics associated with an ontological materialism and reductionism that is antithetical to “supernatural” worldviews (see, e.g., de Caro & MacArthur, 2000, 2004a; Dupré, 1993; Ellis, 2009; Mahner, 2012). In other words, far from being metaphysically neutral, modern science endorses the naturalistic “view that all that exists is our lawful spatiotemporal world” (Mahner, 2012, p. 1437). Metaphysical naturalism, Mahner (2012) added, should be considered essentially constitutive of science—“a tacit metaphysical supposition of science, an ontological postulate” (p. 1438) without which science would no longer be science (cf. Schafersman, 1997).

While Friedman (2002, 2013a) has been silent on this subject, MacDonald (2013) duly conceded that naturalistic science, like religion, is based on unverifiable metaphysical assumptions. As Dupré (1993) pointed out, “It is now widely understood that science cannot progress without powerful assumptions about the world it is trying to investigate, without, that is to say, a prior metaphysics” (p. 1). One of science’s main metaphysical assumptions, MacDonald continued, is the commitment to an “ontological materialism or naturalism” (p. 316) that favors reductionist explanations, for example, seeking to explain spirituality through neurobiological mechanisms. MacDonald understands that this commitment has the same assumptive epistemological status as what he calls a “transcendental reductionism” that views “transpersonal phenomena as ontologically real and of a source and quality that is not reducible to material processes” (p. 318). However, he unwarrantedly concluded that such a predicament, instead of encouraging metaphysical pluralism or neutrality, renders “the criticism of reductionism…as holding little value in advancing transpersonal science” (p. 318). The upshot of this move is that any talk about transcendent or supernatural realities should be “viewed in purely experiential terms” (p. 321) with “anything that is available to human experience [being] a legitimate focus of scientific study” (p. 321). Although such radical empiricism (after James, 1912/2002) is salutary, experientialism—the reduction of spiritual phenomena to human experience—generates a plethora of problems for transpersonal psychology. As I have examined those problems elsewhere (Ferrer, 2002), the present discussion focuses on other issues.

In The Empirical Stance (2002), the philosopher of science van Fraassen showed that the common association of scientific empiricism with naturalistic and materialistic metaphysical theories is not only unwarranted, but also misleading and ideological. Essentially, van Fraassen argued, whenever
empiricism is linked to any metaphysical or philosophical position telling what the world is like, one cannot avoid falling into ideological false consciousness: “There is no factual thesis itself invulnerable to empiricist critique and simultaneously the basis for the empiricist critique of metaphysics” (p. 46). To be consistent, van Fraassen maintained, empiricism should be regarded as a methodological stance—that is, an attitude, orientation, or approach free from necessary specific beliefs or theses about reality and thus potentially open to both secular and religious worldviews. His concluding passage merits reproduction at length:

Each of the ‘isms’ I mention here [i.e., materialism, naturalism, secularism] has at some point appropriated for itself all the credit for the advances of science, in order to claim its liberating power and moral authority. Each has at some point intimated that it consists in nothing more than full-fledged acceptance of what science tells us about the world. Coupled with this, a little paradoxical, comes the insistence that science would die if it weren’t for the scientists’ conscious or unconscious adherence to this philosophical position. All of this is false; in fact, it is in philosophy that we see the most glaring examples of false consciousness and they occur precisely at this point. (pp. 194–195)

Similarly, Dupré (2004) explained how the naturalistic opposition to supernatural agents or explanations often degenerates into a physicalism endorsing a monistic metaphysical worldview that is in conflict with empiricism (i.e., monistic in the sense that everything in existence consists of and can be explained in terms of a single substance: physical matter). Since the completeness of physics is not empirically warranted, Dupré added, such monism is a supernatural myth at odds with empiricist standards. The problems with physicalism and materialism as metaphysical doctrines are exacerbated by the many failures of reductionism in biology, genetics, ecology, and psychology (Dupré, 1993). In addition, important contemporary trends in complexity theory, nonlinear science, and neuroscience not only postulate diverse forms of downward causation but also challenge the epistemic superiority of reductionist explanations (e.g., Andersen, Emmeche, Finne-mann, & Christiansen, 2000; Beauregard, 2007). In this context, transpersonal psychologists may be especially interested in Fingelkurts and Fingelkurts’s (2009) thorough rebuttal of the 15 most frequent arguments used to reduce religious experience to neurobiology. “The only conclusion from observed neuroscientific studies,” they summarized, “is that religious experience is reflected in brain activity and that the brain somehow mediates some aspects of religiosity” (p. 312). As the nonlinear scientist Scott (2004) wrote, “Reductionism is not a conclusion of science but a belief of many scientists” (p. 66). Other scholars support Dupré’s (1993, 2004) concerns and highlight the problems raised by this naturalistic metaphysical worldview for religion. Habermas (2008), for example, wrote the following: “The ontologization of natural scientific knowledge into a naturalistic worldview reduced to ‘hard facts’ is not science but bad metaphysics” (p. 207). He added that with its naturalistic worldview, “scientism enters into a genuine relation of competition
with religious doctrine” (p. 245). This naturalism becomes a “quasi-religion” (Plantinga, 2011, p. x) in its answering (even if in the negative) questions concerning the existence of God or the intrinsic meaning of life. Critiquing the “religious” temperament of naturalistic empiricism, Irwin (2008) pointed out:

Those who fail to recognize the truth of this empiricism are condemned to ignorance; “salvation” lies in embracing the materialist belief that all religious causality is reducible to biology, evolutionary psychology, and/or sociocultural conditioning. (pp. 197–198)

Metaphysical naturalism further assumes “that when religious people claim to have had supernatural experiences that defy rational explanations they are mistaken in some way” (McCutcheon, 1999, p. 127). The naturalistic paradigm, in Byrne’s (1999) words, “far from being a neutral description…assumes the falsity and/or irrationality of religious thought and practice” (p. 251).

It is also important to consider that, as Bilgrami (2000) explained, science’s adoption (in the 17th century) of a naturalist metaphysics that voids the natural world of spiritual or divine presence was not, contra widespread belief, a scientific necessity—rather, it was historically motivated by powerful political and economic factors (see also Nagel, 2012). To be sure, as Tarnas (1991) pointed out, the disenchantment of the natural world was overdetermined by a plethora of philosophical, social, political, and psychological factors. Reflecting this complexity, powerful political alliances between key ideologues of the Royal Society of London and commercial interests, intersecting with strictly scientific considerations, seem to have played a key role in the triumph of a naturalistic worldview (cf. Kubrin, 1980). After all, Bilgrami wrote, “from an anima mundi, one could not simply proceed to take at whim and will” (p. 42), but a disenchanted world devoid of value, purpose, or divinity could be easily turned into “natural resources” to be recklessly exploited.

Beyond its ideological underpinnings, the systematic deflationary bracketing of supernatural claims can have a fatal consequence for transpersonal research, effectively blinding researchers from the actual presence of supernatural (i.e., standing outside of the currently known or accepted natural world) agents or forces at play in the shaping of spiritual and transpersonal events. After all, as Mahner (2012) stressed, the “no-supernatural principle” (p. 1442) is not only a methodological but also a metaphysical supposition of modern science. Even in philosophy, all varieties of naturalism are joined in their rejection of supernatural agents such as gods, angels, or spirits (see de Caro & MacArthur, 2000, 2004a).

However, as Northcote (2004) persuasively argued, the methodological suspension of the validity of supernormal claims (e.g., about metaphysical entities or levels of reality), far from warranting objectivism or scholarly neutrality in the study of religion, may actually constitute a bias against “the possibility that people’s thinking and behaviour are indeed based on various supernormal forces ... a bracketing approach will falsely attribute mundane sociological [or biological] explanations to behaviour that is in actuality shaped by supernormal forces” (p. 89). Accordingly, Northcote issued a call for
dialogue between Western naturalistic and alternative perspectives in the appraisal of supernormal claims. Wallace (2000) made a similar point regarding scientific materialism: “If there are any nonphysical influences on physical events, unquestioning acceptance of this belief [in the causally closed nature of the physical world] will ensure that those influences will not be recognized” (p. 25). Thus, I argue that unless one subscribes ideologically to a naturalistic metaphysics, it may be prudent—and heuristically fertile—not to reject a priori the possibility of effective causation from the various metaphysical sources and/or subtle psychic influences described by religious and spiritual practitioners.\(^9\)

In light of modern science’s metaphysical commitments, it is evident that Friedman’s (2002, 2013a) proposal fails to meet its own standards. Scientific naturalism is not only thoroughly metaphysical, but also arguably shaped by economic interests perpetuating an eco-pernicious, disenchanted worldview that imposes methodological blinders on transpersonal researchers. As the famous dictum goes, “epistemology drives metaphysics,” and so, whether in science or transpersonal psychology, metaphysical skepticism is usually rooted in an allegiance to neo-Kantian epistemology, to which I now turn.

### ON TRANSPERSONAL NEO-KANTIANISM

Both Friedman (2002, 2013a) and MacDonald (2013) advised that transpersonal psychology should remain metaphysically agnostic toward any ontological reality beyond the physical and psychological, and simply focus on the scientific study of human experience.\(^10\) This apparently cautious stance, however, is dependent on the validity of neo-Kantian frameworks that bracket the existence of supernatural and metaphysical sources of spiritual and transpersonal phenomena. Although Kant’s actual views on this matter are far from clear (Perovich, 1990), neo-Kantian frameworks assume that innate or deeply seated epistemic constraints in human cognition render impossible and therefore illicit any knowledge claim about metaphysical realities. In other words, metaphysical (noumenal) worlds may exist, but the only thing accessible is the human situated phenomenal awareness of them.\(^11\)

Friedman (2002) is explicit about his commitment to neo-Kantian dualism. After stating that “science can directly study phenomena but not underlying noumena” (p. 182), he restricted transpersonal psychology to the scientific study of “transpersonal phenomena”—removing any talk about possible “transcendent noumena” from its scope (p. 182).\(^12\) A scientific transpersonal psychology, then, should be skeptical and agnostic about the existence of any transcendent referent and stick with the study of human experience. By “transcendent,” however, Friedman means different things in different essays. Initially, he reified “the transcendent” into a single ineffable and transcategorical mystical ultimate: “I consider it [the transcendent] to be the ultimate holistic concept that can only be experienced, if at all, in a direct and unmediated fashion unhampered by any specific limitation” (p. 182). Later he reformulated this notion as “anything that is supernatural and metaphysical
(e.g., that might be outside of space and time)” (2013a, p. 307). In both accounts, Friedman argued, transpersonal psychology should remain metaphysically agnostic because the transcendent is transconceptual, that is, “beyond categories” (2013a, p. 183).

One of the problems with this account is that there is no such thing as “the transcendent” in the singular, but instead a rich variety of spiritual ultimates that, while some are indeed said to be transconceptual, can nonetheless be theorized in numerous ways—as hundreds of religious texts attest. In addition, many allegedly supernatural spiritual phenomena are thoroughly conceptual and so they escape Friedman’s (2002, 2013) demarcation criterion concerning scientific transpersonal psychology’s scope of study. Consider, for example, spiritual visions such as Ezekiel’s Divine Chariot, Hildegard’s visionary experience of the Trinity, or Black Elk’s Great Vision, as well as spiritual realms such as Buddha lands, the Heavenly Halls of Merkavah mysticism, and the many subtle worlds posited by Western esoteric schools or shamanic traditions. These realms and visionary referents are far from being formless or “beyond categories” and are claimed to exist beyond physical and psychological domains. While Friedman’s portrayal of the transcendent may be consistent with certain apophatic mysticisms (Sells, 1994), it is by no means inclusive of the variety of ways in which supernatural realities have been enacted, understood, and described.

In addition, scientific transpersonal psychology cannot study the transcendent, Friedman (2013a) claimed, because “any direct, nonmediated knowing would not be conceptual but another ilk outside of the parameters of science” (p. 306). Direct knowledge, however, can be conceptualized. Right this moment I am having a direct experience of the hot chocolate I am drinking, but this does not prevent me from potentially describing it (e.g., as warm, spicy, bittersweet) and thus study it. To be sure, such experience, like transcendent ones, has mediated elements (e.g., cultural predispositions), but they are rather insignificant compared to its direct qualities (i.e., no cultural influence will make my hot chocolate taste like cold orange juice; cf. King, 1988). As Wilber (1995) put it, “I find myself in immediate experience of mediated worlds” (p. 601).

The entire mediated-unmediated dichotomy, however, is ultimately parasitic of neo-Kantian epistemology: On the one hand, there is an unfathomable noumenon or “thing-in-itself,” and, on the other, a variety of mediating factors or mechanisms through which such reality becomes phenomenally accessible. These factors (e.g., deep structures, paradigms, conceptual frameworks, languages, cognitive schemes, and neural-physiological mechanisms), so the Kantian story goes, not only operate at conscious and unconscious levels of awareness, but also limit and shape in fundamental ways what can be possibly known about the world. Central to the notion of mediation is the claim that it is only through these constructions and mechanisms that human beings can make intelligible the raw input of an otherwise inscrutable reality.

As discussed elsewhere (Ferrer, 2002), after disposing of the Kantian two-worlds metaphysical doctrine and related dogmas such as the scheme-content dualism (Davidson, 1984), these so-called mediating factors—far from being limiting or
distorting—can be seen as the vehicles through which reality or being self-manifests through the human (cf. Schillbrack, 2014). Mediation is thus transformed from an obstacle into the very means that enable human beings to directly participate in the self-disclosure of the world. Tarnas (1991) gets to the heart of the matter:

All human knowledge of the world is in some sense determined by subjective principles [mediating factors]; but instead of considering these principles as belonging ultimately to the separate human subject, and therefore not grounded in the world independently of human cognition, this participatory conception held that these subjective principles are in fact an expression of the world’s own being, and that the human mind is ultimately the organ of the world’s own process of self-revelation. (pp. 433–434)

Friedman (2002) has also overlooked the religious implications of his transpersonal neo-Kantianism. After his rightful plea against the use of transpersonal psychology “to promulgate any specific religious or spiritual folks traditions” (p. 176; cf. Friedman, 2009), he wrote that his claim regarding the unknowability of transcendent noumena is “congruent with…the Judaic emphasis on the essential mystery of God’s unknowability and the Taoist emphasis in the Tao Te Ching that those who speak about the Tao do not know of what they speak” (p. 182). However, many (arguably most) mystical traditions—from Advaita Vedanta to Raja Yoga to most Buddhist schools to many forms of Christian mysticism—do defend the possibility of directly knowing such ultimate referent or reality (cf. King, 1999). Incidentally, Friedman’s inclusion of Taoism as supporting his view is dubious since claims for immediate dynamic attunement to the Tao in this tradition are well known (e.g., Kohn, 2001).

My aim here is not to argue for any particular epistemic viewpoint but merely to show the inescapability of metaphysical (and perhaps even religious) commitments in human inquiry, whether scientific or not. Actually, since the impossibility of directly knowing God is especially central to Judaism (as Ain Sof or primordial divinity), Gnosticism, and certain Christian and Muslim apophatic mystics, one could charge Friedman’s (2002) proposal with inadvertently accomplishing exactly what he seeks (and implicitly claims) to avoid: He confines transpersonal research within the epistemological and metaphysical strictures of particular Western religious traditions.13

In sum, the legitimacy of metaphysical agnosticism and skepticism is contingent on the validity of a neo-Kantian dualistic metaphysics, which further undermines the professed metaphysical neutrality of transpersonal scientism. In effect, Friedman’s (2002) account creates an implicit hierarchy not only between particular Western traditions (which got it right) and most other religious traditions (which got it wrong), but also, as the next section stresses, between Western and non-Western epistemic frameworks.

Western Ethnocentrism and Epistemic Colonialism

Neo-Kantian skepticism is not only empirically unwarranted, but also requires the ethnocentric dismissal of the cognitive claims of most of the world spiritual...
practitioners. This is evident in the way it explicitly or implicitly dismisses supernatural claims made by spiritual practitioners as pre-critical, ingenuous, dogmatic, or even primitive and superstitious. In the context of religious studies, Irwin (2008) caustically wrote about such an attitude:

> Causality attributed to nonempirical sources, neither measurable nor scientifically testable, must be relegated to the dust bins of history as quaint misbeliefs held by “folk” believers, whose poor intuitions have led them astray into the murky subterranean depths of the unconscious, social repression, and the denied stirrings of primal needs and desires. (p. 198)

In other words, since the world’s Indigenous and contemplative traditions have not undergone the Kantian revolution of the modern West, their cognitive claims should not be taken seriously. Instead, traditional supernatural claims should be taken symbolically, critically filtered through Western epistemologies, or translated into Western scientific or academic categories.

Consider how Friedman’s (2002, 20013a) neo-Kantianism led him to believe that noumenal or ultimate reality is unavoidably inaccessible to human cognition. This claim contradicts most contemplative and Indigenous epistemic frameworks, which explicitly assert such access (e.g., Forman, 1989; King, 1999; Klein, 1986; Irwin, 1994). The problem here is that assuming neo-Kantianism is right elevates a highly questionable Western epistemology (see e.g., Davidson, 1984; Schillbrack, 2014; Schrader, 1967; Tarnas, 1991) as superior to all other non-Western epistemic frameworks.

Of course, the reevaluation of non-Western emic frameworks in contemporary debates does not settle the contested issues (Ferrer & Sherman, 2008b); rather, it simply but crucially highlights the fact that Western epistemologies may not be the last arbiters in the assessment of religious knowledge claims, and in particular of those emerging from long-term spiritual practice or ritual. As King (1999) stated:

> My point is not that Western scholars should necessarily accept the emic [epistemological] perspectives over which they are claiming the authority to speak, but rather that they at least entertain the possibility that such perspectives are a legitimate stance to adopt and engage them in constructive debate. (p. 183)

This approach entails more than merely taking emic claims as inspirations for “real” scientific research (which Friedman accepts)—one must also consider the relevance of emic epistemic frameworks to alternatively understand ways of knowing and assess knowledge claims.

Friedman (2013a) sees value in adopting emic perspectives in cross-cultural encounters but only to a point. Since such perspectives are based on supernatural assumptions, he considered such an approach “potentially dangerous for those who desire to maintain their so-called scientific objectivity through keeping an etic perspective. However, having an emic perspective can
be useful, if the etic perspective can also be kept intact” (p. 303). In other words, non-Western standpoints are to be appreciated insofar as they do not challenge Western frameworks and their supposedly “objective” standards. Friedman’s (2013a) account of transpersonal psychology’s mission gives the show away. He stated: “Transpersonal psychology can be seen as an attempt to replace traditional spiritual and folk psychological worldviews with perspectives congruent with those of modern science, that can develop scientifically through empirical research” (p. 310; emphasis added). Emic perspectives and categories, that is, should be not only translated but also ultimately replaced by Western scientific ones.

In counterpoint to Friedman’s (2013a) suggestion, an increasing number of anthropologists, scholars of religion, and transpersonal thinkers refuse the translation of religious terms into Western scientific concepts. In addition to Stoller’s (Stoller & Olkes, 1987) participatory rejection of ethnographic realism in anthropology, many contemporary scholars endorse the application of emic categories in the study of religion and spirituality. For example, Saler (2000) suggested that scholarship could benefit from the use of folk categories (e.g., the Hindu concept of dharma) as tools of anthropological analysis (cf. Lancaster, 2013). Transpersonal scholar Rothberg (2000) made an even stronger case in the context of spiritual inquiry:

To interpret spiritual approaches through categories like “data,” “evidence,” “verification,” “method,” “confirmation,” and “intersubjectivity” may be to enthrone these categories as somehow the hallmarks of knowledge… But might not a profound encounter with practices of spiritual inquiry lead to considering carefully the meaning of other comparable categories (e.g., dhyana, vichara, theoria, gnosis, or contemplatio) and perhaps to developing understandings of inquiry in which such spiritual categories are primary or central when we speak of knowledge? To assume that the categories of current western [sic] epistemology are adequate for interpreting spiritual approaches is to prejudge the results of such an encounter, which might well lead to significant changes in these categories. (pp. 175–176)

These and others scholars are persuasively arguing that importing Western epistemic categories to analyze and account for the validity of knowledge claims from all cultures, ways of knowing, and domains of reality is highly questionable (cf. Roth, 2008). Most religious and spiritual endeavors, I should add, are aimed not so much at describing or explaining human nature and the world, but at engaging and transforming them in creative and participatory ways (see, e.g., Apffel-Marglin, 2011; Ferrer & Sherman, 2008a; Hollenback, 1996), and may therefore call for different validity standards than those emerging from the rationalistic study of the natural world.

In closing this section, a number of questions arise: Might not the very goals and assumptions of Western research programs be revised in the encounter with non-Western understandings? Should not a truly postcolonial scholarship be open to be transformed at depth by transcultural methodological
interactions? Can scholars dance between etic and emic, insider and outsider stances, in their approach to spiritual phenomena, particularly those involving supernatural or metaphysical claims? Paraphrasing Kripal (2006), I propose that it is as important to let go of the pride of the insider and embrace the “gnosis of the outsider” as it is to let go of the pride of the outsider and embrace the “gnosis of the insider.” To this end, transpersonal scholarship may need to navigate successfully between the Scylla of uncritical acceptance of all emic claims (“romanticism and going native”) and the Charybdis of assuming Western epistemological superiority (“colonialism and epistemic violence”).

I suggest that transpersonal psychology will be fully free from epistemic colonialism only when it stops taking for granted Western frameworks such as neo-Kantianism or scientific empiricism as absolutely privileged in the study of the world’s traditions (even if science can be considered a superior approach to study particular empirical aspects of religion, e.g., brain activity and cognitive capacities functioning; see Lancaster, 2004, 2013). Postcolonial transpersonal approaches should not be motivated by politically or spiritually correct attitudes (often rooted in cultural guilt) but by a blend of epistemological boldness and humility that embraces the potential value of different epistemic frameworks, while concurrently acknowledging the limits of the analytic rationality cultivated in the modern West. The next section elaborates on this critical point.

**Neo-Kantianism, Disembodiment, and Existential Alienation**

Thinkers as diverse as Bordo (1987), Leder (1990), Nagatomo (1992), Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991), and Yasuo (1987) have suggested that the process of increasing dissociation between mental and somatic worlds, which characterized important strains of the modern Western trajectory, was an important source of both the postulation and the success of the Cartesian mind-body doctrine. The overcoming of Cartesian dualism, therefore, may not be so much a philosophical but a practical, existential, and transformative task.

In a similar vein, I propose that the Kantian two-worlds doctrine (and its associated epistemic skepticism) is largely dependent on the estrangement of the human mind from an embodied apprehension of reality. As contemporary cognitive science shows, “Our sense of what is real begins with and depends crucially upon our bodies…. As embodied, imaginative creatures, we never were separated or divorced from reality in the first place” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 17, p. 93).16 If this is correct, then it becomes entirely understandable that the decline of embodied participation in human inquiry, arguably precipitated by the disconnection between mind and body, may have undermined the sense of being in touch with the real, engendering the Kantian mentalist dualism of a merely phenomenal world and an always inaccessible noumenal reality.17

As Tarnas (1991) suggested, this epistemic dualism contributes in fundamental ways to the existential estrangement of the modern self. By placing the
individual inexorably out of touch with the “real” world, the alienating Cartesian gap between subject and object is epistemologically affirmed and secured: “Thus the cosmological estrangement of modern consciousness initiated by Copernicus and the ontological estrangement initiated by Descartes were completed by the epistemological estrangement initiated by Kant: a threefold mutually enforced prison of modern alienation” (p. 419). Tarnas’s analysis brings to the foreground the pernicious implications of this dualism for human participation in spiritual knowledge:

The Cartesian-Kantian paradigm both expresses and ratifies a state of consciousness in which experience of the unitive numinous depths of reality has been systematically extinguished, leaving the world disenchanted and the human ego isolated. Such a world view is, as it were, a kind of metaphysical and epistemological box. (p. 431)

One of the central issues at stake in this discussion is whether some kind of personal engagement and even transformation—such as body-mind integration, triumph over mental pride, or the development of contemplative competences—are needed for the enactment, apprehension, and assessment of certain truth claims (see Evans, 1993; Ferrer & Sherman, 2008b; Kasulis, 2002; Krippal, 2006; Taber, 1983). After all, most contemplative traditions hold that in order to ascertain their most fundamental insights, practitioners need to develop cognitive competences beyond the structures of linguistic rationality. In the end, as Krippal (2006) reminded us, “Rationalism and reductionism…are also state-specific truths (that is, they are specific to highly trained egoic forms of awareness), but their states of mind are more easily reproduced and communicated, at least within our present Western cultures” (pp. 141–142).

Indeed, modern Western education emphasizes the development of the mind’s rational and intellectual powers, paying little attention to the maturation of other ways of knowing. A common outcome is that most individuals in the Western culture reach adulthood with a conventionally mature mental functioning but with poorly or irregularly developed somatic, emotional, aesthetic, intuitive, and spiritual intelligences (Ferrer, 2003; Ferrer, Romero, & Albareda, 2005; Gardner, 1983/1993). But then, can the modern mind admit that its mastered epistemic competencies may not be the final or necessarily superior cognitive plateau, and yet maintain and even sharpen its critical look toward oppressive, repressive, and untenable religious beliefs and ideologies?

These issues are central for assessing contemporary proposals for a scientific transpersonal psychology, which, following the mandates of modern science, posit the replicability and public nature of observation to be paramount. If specific types of personal transformation are necessary to enact or access particular spiritual referents, such replicable public nature is then naturally limited to those who have transformed themselves in those specific ways. Although conventional science makes cognitive demands to its practitioners (e.g., years of study, practical lab trainings, etc.), the demands of a personally transformative inquiry are obviously greater and rather unconventional from
mainstream scientific or philosophical perspectives (for notable exceptions, see Kasulis, 2002; Taber, 1983; Wallace, 2004).

Although Friedman (2002, 2013a) supported Tart’s (1972) proposal for state-specific sciences, in which researchers may be required to undergo meditative training to study transpersonal phenomena, he restricted those phenomena to human experiences and remarked that such training “is not dissimilar to the years of mastery required by researchers in areas of conventional science” (Friedman, 2002, p. 185). These statements suggest that Friedman is discussing meditative skills training aimed at mapping states of mind, not the personal, existential, and even ontological transformation most traditions consider necessary to apprehend what have traditionally been understood as supernatural or metaphysical referents (see, e.g., Dupré, 1996; Hollenback, 1996; Lanzetta, 2008). In the next section, I turn to a closer examination of Friedman’s account of science.

**Transpersonal Science or Scientism?**

Avoiding the hardest form of scientism, Friedman (2013a) repeatedly stated that the nonscientific approaches he seeks to expurgate from transpersonal psychology are “neither intrinsically more or less valuable than science” (p. 308). However, a strong scientism and positivism animate Friedman’s assumptions that (a) modern science is less metaphysically biased and more progressive than other inquiry traditions, (b) a definite boundary can be drawn between science and nonscience, and (c) there is unity in the scientific method (for a lucid account of scientism, see Sorell [1991]). Each of these assumptions is problematic.

First, Friedman’s (2002, 2013a) claim that scientific approaches are free (or freer) from the metaphysical baggage that in his view afflicts philosophical and religious traditions reveals his faith in the positivist dream of science as the unproblematic path to nondogmatic knowledge. After all, as Sorell (1991) concluded in his study, “The new scientism in philosophy is a kind of naturalism” (p. 177). In the same spirit, Friedman’s insistence that scientific research into the transcendent is implausible closely follows the understanding in classical logical positivism that metaphysical claims or “statements alluding to some transcendental reality [are] meaningless, since they could not be verified” (Tauber, 2009, p. 92). In addition, Friedman (2013a) characterized science as distinctively progressive: “Scientific strategy facilitates progress, rather than stagnation, and differentiates transpersonal psychology as a science from traditional worldviews and religions, as well as philosophy” (p. 304). This statement suggests that Friedman wants to have it both ways: On the one hand, he wants to avoid the charge of scientism by stating that he does not regard science as superior to religion or philosophy; on the other, he claims that epistemic progress is exclusive of science (but then, why would not science be cognitively superior?). As history shows, however, many scientific disciplines—from anatomy to astronomy to acoustics—do not show any substantial progress for decades whereas many nonscientific ones (e.g., literary criticism or military strategy) arguably do (Laudan, 1996). Thus, “progress” as specific to
science (and missing from nonscience) will not do. Although the case for “progress” is a thorny one in all inquiry traditions, one might argue that not only philosophical but also spiritual traditions show signs of epistemic progress, for example, in their understanding of liberation, response to new historical demands, or invention of novel methods to more effectively achieve their ends. In any event, it is important to remember, “faith in progress” as a distinguishing feature of science was another canon of the positivist doctrine that Friedman resuscitates (see, e.g., Tauber, 2009, p. 50).

Second, Friedman’s (2002, 2013a) division between scientific transpersonal psychology and nonscientific transpersonal studies is questionable because no definite demarcation criterion between science and nonscience (or pseudoscience) has ever been successfully established. After a thorough review of proposed demarcation criteria (including method, verifiability, and falsifiability), Laudan (1996) wrote, “no demarcation line between science and nonscience, or between science and pseudo-science, … would win assent from a majority of philosophers” (p. 211). The demarcation problem, Laudan concluded, is an ideological pseudoproblem:

If we would stand up and be counted on the side of reason, we ought to drop terms like “pseudo-science” and “unscientific” from our vocabulary; they are just hollow phrases which do only emotive work for us. As such, they are more suited to the rhetoric of politicians and Scottish sociologists of knowledge than to that of empirical researchers. (p. 222).

Furthermore, although relocating psychology within the science camp, Friedman (2002, 2013a) perpetuates the classical Two Cultures split (Snow, 1959/1964) between the sciences (physics, chemistry, and biology) and the humanities (sociology, psychology, and anthropology) that contemporary sociology of knowledge and science studies have so effectively dismantled: “Science no longer resides outside the humanities as some distant colony of academic inquiry” (Tauber, 2009, p. 11). Even though the positivist picture of science still dominates “popular conceptions of science” (p. 12), Tauber (2009) continued, “science has been dethroned from its special positivist pedestal, and a One Culture mentality has emerged to challenge the Two Culture picture of science and society” (p. 12). Once scientism is fully exorcised from science, Tauber argued, science can be re-integrated within the larger tradition of humanistic inquiry from which it originated.

Third, Friedman’s (2002, 2013a) portrayal of science as possessing a singular method with invariant qualities that can be set against “nonscientific” approaches resurrects another long-gone positivist dream. The very failure to demarcate between science and nonscience was largely due to, and intensified by, the vast diversity of so-called scientific practices. For Laudan (1996), the lack of agreement about the features of “the scientific method” means that the “unity of method” thesis should be regarded as refuted. As Duhem (1908) showed, accounts of the scientific method “bore little resemblance to the methods actually used by working scientists” (Laudan, 1996, p. 214)—a conclusion extensively corroborated today by research into actual scientific
practice (e.g., Shapin, 2010; for a balanced review of science studies, see Tauber, 2009). Despite the exaggerations of some postmodern constructionists, Tauber (2009) concluded, “Historical and sociological studies have demonstrated beyond the reasonable doubt that the working practices of scientific disciplines are both incompletely and inaccurately portrayed by the methodologies to which scientists officially subscribe” (p. 130).

What is more, Dupré (1993, 2004) pointed out that scholars typically use the rhetoric of science’s methodological unity to ideologically dismiss (perhaps with good reasons) disciplines whose knowledge claims they consider to be far-fetched, unreliable, or dogmatic. As Dupré (2004) wrote, however, “If one thinks of the daily practice of a theoretical physicist, a field taxonomist, a biochemist, or a neurophysiologist, it is hard to believe that there is anything fundamentally common to their activities that constitutes them all as practitioners of the Scientific Method” (p. 42). Furthermore, Dupré (1993) argued, such a “disunity of science” is not a temporary state of affairs to be overcome in the future by superior cognitive or technological achievements, but “rather reflects accurately the underlying ontological complexity of the world” (p. 7). Summing up the issues with both the demarcation project and the unity of science, de Caro and MacArthur (2004b) wrote:

…science has no essence and … the very idea of a sharp division between what is scientific and what is not is highly questionable. Indeed, the ideal of the unity of sciences is an unrealized and unrealizable dream. The point is not just that there is no single method or set of methods that is properly called the scientific method, but, more than this, that there is no clear, uncontroversial, and useful definition of science to do the substantial work scientific naturalists require of it. (p. 15)

Taken together, these assumptions about science disclose a positivist scientism in Friedman’s (2002, 2013a) proposal that I find counterproductive for the integrity and appropriate epistemological legitimation of transpersonal psychology. In the end, as Walach (2013) pointed out, “at least part of the transpersonal enterprise is in fact an implicit or explicit challenge to the entire history and set of methodologies by which science and scientific psychology is done” (p. 68). Before exploring alternatives to Friedman’s project, I briefly consider its implications for transpersonal research.

**Scientific Transpersonal Research Programs**

In a section suitably titled, “What is left for transpersonal psychology to study,” Friedman (2013a) reiterated that transpersonal psychology should exclusively research the physical and psychological aspects of transpersonal phenomena. Arguably controverting his earlier support of qualitative methods, Friedman (2013a) further claimed that transpersonal psychology should not research lived transpersonal experiences and instead study the expansion of one’s “self-concept” or mental-linguistic understanding of one’s identity (e.g., using his Self-Expansiveness Level Form; Friedman, 1983). Since Friedman’s
To be sure, researching the self-concept is a legitimate endeavor, but as a transpersonal scholar I am mostly interested not in what people “think” about their identity but how they actually “experience” it. In my view, the “self-concept” is a construct whose value to measure or assess transpersonal states or growth is dubious. While the self-concept can change after a lived expansion of consciousness, it can also expand, for example, after reading an evocative spiritual book—think of Watts’s (1966/1989) *The Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*—or after becoming intellectually familiar with transpersonal psychology, the notion of the ecological self, and so forth. Transpersonal psychologists should seek to assess transpersonal states through the study of changes in felt-sensed self-identity, not of mental views about such identity. Friedman’s belief that only the self-concept can be researched is mistaken—changes in lived self-identity can be identified via qualitative methods, for example, longitudinal phenomenological studies of meditation practice. Friedman might respond that phenomenological reports necessarily refer to the self-concept, but it is one thing to report one’s views on self-identity, and quite another to report one’s lived experience of such identity (see, e.g., van Manen, 1990).

Interestingly, Friedman (2013a) claimed to embrace not only James’s (1912/2002) radical empiricism but also Tart’s (1972) state-specific sciences—approaches that consider data from both outer and inner (or introceptive) senses. Contra mystical claims, however, Friedman quickly added that nonduality and other spiritual states are terms without empirical referents and therefore they lie beyond the scope of scientific transpersonal psychology. The issue at stake here is what Friedman considers to be “inner data.” After including phenomenological and electroencephalographic data, he qualified the kind of empirical data that in his view a community of meditators can produce: “Insofar as some in such community might have what could be described as transcendent experiences, those would be outside the realm of science to study directly (i.e., I would see these direct experiences as noumenal, not phenomenal)” (p. 309). Once again, Friedman’s neo-Kantianism traps him in an epistemic box that is hermetically sealed by its own critical presuppositions—this time, one that James’s radical empiricist openness to direct nonlinguistic experience actually overcomes (Blum, 2014; Taylor & Wozniak, 1996). All the above suggests the need to explore transpersonal epistemologies and research programs free from neo-Kantian assumptions and exclusive allegiance to a naturalistic metaphysics—a task for the rest of this essay.

### A Participatory Metaphysical Pluralism

Integrating the work of Davidson (1984), Tarnas (1991), and Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991), among others, participatory approaches eschew...
the Kantian two-worlds dualism by regarding human beings as vehicles for the creative self-unfolding of reality and the enaction (or “bringing forth”) of directly knowable spiritual worlds, realms, or domains of distinctions (e.g., Ferrer, 2002, 2008a; Ferrer & Sherman, 2008a; Hartelius & Ferrer, 2013; Irwin, 1996, 2008). Whereas perennialism (and confessional and theological stances) posits a single or primary transcendent reality (see Ferrer, 2000, 2002) and modern science subscribes to a naturalistic worldview that brackets, denies, or reduces supernatural referents (e.g., de Caro & MacArthur, 2000, 2004a), participatory pluralism allows for a plurality of enacted spiritual worlds that can in principle be accounted for in both naturalistic and supernaturalistic fashions:

…to embrace a participatory understanding of religious knowledge is not necessarily linked to confessional, religionist, or supernaturalist premises or standpoints. …virtually all the same participatory implications for the study of religion can be practically drawn if we were to conceive, or translate the term, spirit in a naturalistic fashion as an emergent creative potential of life, nature, or reality. …Whether such creative source is a transcendent spirit or immanent life will likely be always a contested issue, but one, we believe, that does not damage the general claims of the participatory turn. (Ferrer & Sherman, 2008b, p. 72)

Thus, whereas both perennialism and scientism commit transpersonal psychology to a single metaphysical worldview—transcendentalist and naturalistic, respectively—participatory frameworks free the field from such univocal vows and invite researchers to remain open to multiple metaphysical possibilities. As Daniels (2005) pointed out, “It is vital that we remain pluralistic at this time and do not fall into the trap of committing the discipline as a whole to any particular ontology” (p. 231).

While dispensing with dubious equations among spiritual ultimates (e.g., the Tao is God or Buddhist emptiness is structurally equivalent to the Hindu Brahman), participatory pluralism affirms an undetermined mystery or creative power as the generative source of all spiritual enactions (Ferrer, 2002, 2008b).

This shared spiritual dynamism, however, should be sharply distinguished from any Kantian-like noumenon or “thing-in-itself” endowed with inscrutable qualities in which all spiritual ultimates are always incomplete, culturally conditioned, or cognitively constrained phenomenal manifestations (e.g., Hick, 1992). In contrast, an enactive participatory epistemology (Ferrer, 2002, 2008a; Malkemus, 2012) does away with the Kantian dualism by not only refusing to conceive of the mystery as having objectifiable pregiven attributes (e.g., personal, impersonal, dual, or nondual), but also affirming the radical identity of the manifold spiritual ultimates and the mystery—even if the former do not exhaust the generative ontological possibilities of the latter. Put simply, the mystery cocreatively unfolds in multiple ontological directions (Ferrer, 2011b).

The question rightfully arises: Would not such a participatory account be another metaphysical worldview competing for supremacy? After all, no
spiritual vision or conceptual framework is metaphysically neutral, and the undetermined nature of the mystery espoused by the participatory approach can be seen as especially consistent with Buddhism’s emptiness and apophatic mystical accounts (see Duckworth, 2014; Ferrer, 2002). My use of the term undetermined, however, is eminently performative—that is, it seeks to evoke the sense of not-knowing and intellectual humility that I find most fruitful in approaching the creative power that is the source of our being (Ferrer, 2008a). Rather than affirming negatively (as the term indeterminate does), “undetermined” leaves open the possibility of both determinacy and indeterminacy within the mystery, as well as the paradoxical confluence or even identity of these two apparently polar accounts. As Duckworth (2014) observed regarding this proposal, metaphysical biases are thus neutralized for the most part; such “undetermined ultimate precludes emptiness from being the final word on reality because, being undetermined, ultimate reality can also be disclosed as theistic in a personal God. And importantly, this ‘God’ is not a lower reality than emptiness” (pp. 346–347). Irwin (2008) concurs: “The participatory model is not based on preconceptions about the validity of (or relationship to) any particular metaphysical view, but seeks to elucidate this view as yet another example of authentic spiritual encounter” (p. 200).

The problem of doctrinal ranking is further minimized by both the participatory grounding of qualitative distinctions on pragmatic values (e.g., integration, embodiment, selflessness), and its equiplurality principle, according to which “there can potentially be multiple spiritual enactions that are nonetheless equally holistic and emancipatory” (Ferrer, 2011b, p. 4). I stand by these values—not because I think they are universal, objective, or ahistorical (they are not), but because I firmly believe that their cultivation can effectively reduce today’s personal, relational, social, and planetary suffering. To be sure, the specificities of the various spiritual, transformational goals often derive from ontological views about the nature of reality or the divine, but, as the equiplurality principle maintains, the participatory ranking is not itself precipitated by the privileging of a single spiritual goal, but rather explodes into a plurality of potentially holistic spiritual realizations that can occur within and outside traditions. This principle is founded on the double rejection of an objectivist account of the mystery and a representational paradigm of cognition, according to which there can be only one most accurate representation of an original template with pregiven features (for nonrepresentational epistemologies, see Frisina, 2002). Taken together, these features release participatory spirituality from the dogmatic commitment to any single spiritual system and pave the way for a metaphysically and pragmatically grounded spiritual pluralism (cf. Irwin, 1996).

In addition, this participatory approach bridges the epistemic gap between human experience and reality that is intrinsic to neo-Kantianism. This alienating gap is not only problematized by the aforesaid disembodied origins of Kantian dualism, but also bridged by Davidson’s (1984) dismantling of the scheme-content dualism, Tarnas’s (1991) participatory epistemology, elements of Bhaskar’s (1989) critical realism and James’s (1912/2002) radical empiricism, as well as modern embodied cognitive science (e.g., Chemero, 2009; Clark,
1997; Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991). Many of these approaches, Schillbrack (2014) argued, restore metaphysics as a viable form of contemporary cognitive inquiry.  

At this juncture, it is important to distinguish between two different meanings of the term \textit{metaphysics}. On the one hand, the notion of metaphysics in Western philosophy is generally based on the distinction between appearance and reality, with a “metaphysical statement” being one claiming to portray the “Reality” presumably lying behind the realm of appearances (van Inwagen, 1998). In addition to this use, on the other hand, many religious traditions talk about “metaphysical worlds” to refer to levels, realms, or dimensions of reality existing beyond the sensible world or within the subtle ontological depths of human consciousness (see Ferrer, 2011a; Schillbrack, 2014). Whereas Schillbrack (2014) cogently argued that dropping Kantian assumptions renders religious metaphysical claims cognitively viable in the first sense (“super-empirical,” in his terms), I propose that it also allows \textit{entertaining the plausibility of a deep and ample multidimensional cosmos in which the sensible world (as narrowly conceived by modern naturalism) does not exhaust the possibilities of the Real}.

The consequences of this move for transpersonal research are arguably profound: Stripping the supernatural of its monolithic and transcategorical clothes allows a re-consideration of the existence of diverse subtle realms of energy/consciousness. Intersubjective agreement about these realms can then be pursued in special states of consciousness (after all, ordinary consciousness was evolutionarily shaped to optimize survival in the natural world). The import of not ruling a priori the existence, or the possibility to apprehend, such realms is exemplified by the phenomenon of “shared visions” discussed in the next section.

\textbf{The Epistemological Challenge of Shared Visions}

In 1998, I spent one month in a Shipibo \textit{vegetalista} center in the jungle nearby Iquitos, Peru, drinking the entheogenic brew called ayahuasca every other day (for ayahuasca studies, see Metzner, 2014; Shanon, 2002). At one of my first ayahuasca sessions, I was struck by the vision of a number of nonphysical entities (animal, human, and other-than-human) wandering in the \textit{maloca} (traditional ceremony shed). Perhaps the most striking vision concerned certain entities well known in Indigenous medicine circles.

The vision began with my perception of a thick energetic thread of white light clearly emerging from the healer’s mouth during the singing of an \textit{icaro} (ayahuasca healing song). When I visually followed the thread to the farther corners of the \textit{maloca}, I realized that it was attached to several nonphysical entities entering into the ceremonial shed. Although of humanoid shape (i.e., they had a head, body, arms, and legs), the entities were appreciably taller than humans and apparently made of a fuzzy white light that concealed any identifiable traits beyond their general form.
The "astral doctors," as I later learned these entities are called, moved with apparent volitional precision around a room, for example, situating themselves in front of the ceremony’s participants and extending their arms to make contact with specific areas of participants’ bodies, specially the heart and the vital center. When my turn arrived, their contact resulted in dramatically tangible energetic adjustments of incredible finesse in those centers, accompanied by the feelings of deeply healing, profound gratitude, and instinctive trust in the benevolent nature of the entities. This experience led to a new understanding of the healing power of (at least that particular) ayahuasca ceremony as emerging from the complex interplay of the medicine, the healer, the icaro, and the astral doctors.

The next morning, when I asked the healer about my visions, he nodded his head and verbally corroborated the presence of "astral doctors" at the ceremony. Fascinated by the intersubjective agreement about such "open-eye" visions, I decided to interview the center director and Shipibo elder Guillermo Arevalo (see Ferrer, 2013). During the interview, after distinguishing between ayahuasca visions emerging from personal imagination and those of a more transpersonal or shared nature, Arevalo stated that he and other healers often contrasted their perceptions searching for intersubjective agreement:

We can plan to discuss these perceptions before a ceremony and then talk about it afterwards. In many cases, I ask another shaman sitting in the same ceremony what he saw in order to gain certainty through such agreement. If there is no clear agreement, we can try to achieve it at the following ceremony. (as cited in Ferrer, 2013, p. 17)

Overall, this procedure struck me as remarkably similar to the scientific emphasis on public observation and replicability with one (arguably huge) difference—these healers were discussing entities that scientific naturalism would consider fictitiously supernatural.

The most astonishing shared visionary event I participated in, however, occurred some years earlier at a San Pedro (wachuma) ceremony in Urubamba, Peru (for studies on the Peruvian cactus San Pedro, see Heaven, 2012; Sharon, 1990). Several hours into the ceremony, and totally unexpectedly, I began seeing in front of my open eyes what looked like red, energetic spiderwebs of great complexity that elastically responded to my physical contact. I was so taken by the clarity and interactive nature of the vision that I approached the only other participant—a young U.S. woman who was drinking San Pedro for first time—and, pointing in the direction of the webs, asked her (without describing what I was seeing) whether she could see anything there. To my shock, she described the red, energetic spiderwebs exactly in the ways I was seeing them. When I asked Victoria (the healer), she not only corroborated she was seeing them, but also stated that such energetic visions were a common occurrence in San Pedro ceremonies. The red spiderwebs marked the beginning of nearly two hours of breathtaking external visionary experiences (I later titled the entire episode “Harry Potter Meets the Matrix”)—blue and green energies curatively entering my body, contact with benevolent Indigenous spirits, and
perceptions of energy vortices of diverse colors in the room, some of which stemmed from Victoria’s “power objects.”

Because San Pedro preserves one’s critical capabilities intact (at least in my eight-year experience with this plant), I had my “researcher hat” on during most of the visionary journey. In disbelief about the shared nature of the visions, I repeatedly asked both the other participant and the healer to describe the specificities of their visions in order to verify whether they matched my perceptions. Invariably, when pointed in the direction of my vision and asked “what do you see there?”, they accurately described the color, shape, and directional movements of the various energetic fields I was seeing. This event strongly suggested to me that San Pedro allowed human sight to perceive or enact subtle energetic dimensions of reality; actually, one can often feel San Pedro organically re-training human sight, for example, re-focusing it on the space in-between objects or forms. From this space, in my experience, subtle visions emerge.

The literature is not entirely silent on this type of experience. Indigenous people widely claim that their medicines allow access to an enhanced sensory faculty granting direct perception of subtle energies and spiritual entities—called, for example, “true seeing” by the Matsigenka of Southern Peru (Sheppard, 2014), “second sight” by the Thonga of Mozambique or “stargazing” by the Navajo (Turner, 1992). Elements of the phenomena I experienced have been also documented in the scholarly literature on entheogenic and healing visions. In addition to Shanon’s (2002, pp. 69–85) reports of a variety of ayahuasca “open-eye visualizations,” one of the most powerful examples of shared vision I am familiar with is described in Edith Tuner’s (1992) research into ihamba, a Zambian Ndembu healing ceremony in which the healer extracts an invisible spirit (supposedly visible as an ivory tooth) from the patient’s body. Whereas thirty years earlier her husband the anthropologist Victor Turner’s (1967) “scientific” ethnographic account famously portrayed Ndembu healers as therapeutically skilled sleight-of-hand magicians and denied ontological status to the “extracted” invisible spirit, E. Turner’s (1992) participation in the ritual (which included ingestion of a nonhallucinogenic leaf medicine called nsompu) reportedly opened her to the reality of the Ndembu spiritual world. Central to this discussion, she saw the following and later reported that three healers and the patient shared the same vision:

Suddenly Meru [the patient] raised her arm, stretched it in liberation. And I saw with my own eyes a giant thing emerging out of the flesh of her back. The thing was a large gray blob about six inches across, a deep gray opaque thing emerging as a sphere…The gray thing was actually out there, visible, and you could see [the healer] Singleton’s hands working and scrabbling on the back—and then the thing was there no more. Singleton has it in his pouch, pressing it with his other hand as well. (p. 149)

Intriguingly, only the five people ingesting the nonhallucinogenic medicine saw the “giant thing;” the rest of the group saw only the tooth, which, E. Turner (1992) concluded, should be considered the physical manifestation (vs. a mere
symbol) of the immaterial spirit. She stressed: “I repeat that I did not merely intuit the spirit emerging from Mera’s back but saw it, saw it with my open eyes” (pp. 189–190). This fascinating account powerfully shows how social-scientific reports shaped by naturalistic assumptions can be problematized through participatory research open to Indigenous cosmologies, emic epistemologies, and ostensibly supernatural factors (see also Irwin, 1994).

What to make of these phenomena? Naturalistic scholars can easily dismiss *inner* and/or *individual* visions of this kind as private, subjective, or brain hallucinations. But what about *intersubjectively shared outer visions* such as the ones described above? In general, as Sacks (2012) indicated, the “shareable” (p. ix) nature of sensory claims is what distinguishes successful perception from hallucination. In their discussion of hallucinations, for example, Aleman and Larøi (2008) asked: “What happens in the brain when people see things others do not see…?” (p. 147). Moreover, whether in science or philosophy intersubjective agreement or consensual validation is considered the final mark of “objectivity” or “reality,” so what to make of shared visual perceptions of supernatural phenomena such as nonphysical entities or spirits? The naturalistic mind may understandably appeal to the notion of “collective” or “public hallucinations,” such as rainbows, mirages, reflections in the water, and the like (see van Fraassen, 2008). Unlike the ayahuasca astral doctors, however, rainbows do not autonomously move, intentionally touch people, and palpably alter a person’s embodied experience. Unlike the *wachuma* visions of energetic webs and vortices, mirages neither respond pliantly to physical contact nor do they persist when viewed from different angles. In addition, unlike Turner’s (1992) vision of the *ihamba* spirit, water (or mirrored) reflections do not emerge from a human body at the climax of an extraction healing ritual.

**Beyond Naturalism and Supernaturalism: Toward a Participatory Radical Empiricism and Research Program**

The failure of “public hallucinations” models to account naturalistically for these phenomena leads me to conclude that the above participant-observation reports not only present a powerful challenge to scientific naturalism (and materialism), but also suggest the existence of subtle energetic dimensions of reality coexisting with our own. Equally important, these phenomena raise the possibility of intersubjective testing of so-called supernatural claims through a radical empiricist epistemology (after James, 1912/2002) that challenges the scientist attachment of “empirical validity” to “naturalistic sensory evidence.” After all, spiritual practitioners following similar contemplative and ritual techniques generally reach intersubjective agreement about spiritual insights and realities, even if the falsification of those claims is not possible (Ferrer, 2002, pp. 62–65).

Even if one were to endorse a naturalistic metaphysics, Stroud (2004) names the appropriate question in his 1996 APA (American Philosophical Association) presidential address: “What is and what is not to be included in one’s conception of nature?” (p. 22). Although not fond of supernatural
claims, Stroud recommended an “open naturalism” that “is not committed in advance to any determinate and therefore potentially restrictive conception of what is so” (p. 35). Such open naturalism simply “says that we must accept as true everything we find we have to accept in order to make sense of everything that we think is part of the world” (p. 35). It may be important to remember here that the rational plausibility of so-called supernatural forces or entities is contingent on one’s conscious or unconscious metaphysical commitments. As Ellis (2009) indicated, there is an inescapable logical circle here: “A postulated existent is ontologically plausible if and only if it fits into an adequate metaphysical theory. And a metaphysical theory is adequate if and only if it accommodates all of the things that we truly believe in” (p. 19).

In this light, I propose that transpersonal psychology should overcome the naturalistic/supernaturalistic divide, retire both terms, and endorse a more liberal or open naturalism—one that not only studies the physical and psychological dimensions of transpersonal phenomena, but also is free from materialism and reductionism, thus being open to both the ontological integrity of spiritual referents and the plausibility of subtle dimensions of reality. Once free from a priori allegiance to any particular metaphysical worldview (whether scientist or religionist), researchers can consider multiple methodological standpoints (emic and etic, insider and outsider), epistemologies (objectivist, constructivist, participatory), and metaphysical frameworks (scientific naturalism, perennialism, participatory pluralism) in the discernment of the most cogent account of the perceived phenomena.

Openness to the heuristic value and potential validity of alternate epistemic and metaphysical frameworks does not snare a researcher in relativistic dilemmas. The attempt to rise above the inevitable biases of Western frameworks should not degenerate into a vulgar relativism incapable of offering grounds for qualitative distinctions or cross-cultural criticism. This unfortunate outcome can be avoided by dialogically evaluating all knowledge claims—etic and emic, insider and outsider, naturalistic and supernaturalistic—through validity standards of both dominant and marginal Western and non-Western epistemologies in whatever measure may be appropriate according to the context of the inquiry and the type of knowledge claims. In this scenario, the dividing line between sound and weak scholarship should not be traced between Western and non-Western epistemologies—or naturalistic and supernaturalistic claims—but between methodologies that lead to radically empirical intersubjectively testable outcomes and/or discernible pragmatic consequences and those which do not.

In light of the discussion so far, questions arise for further research to consider. Can transpersonal research programs be open to all accounts, “naturalistic” and “supernaturalistic”? Might such a dialogical approach eventually deconstruct the binary opposition and disclose different ways to “think the world” beyond the naturalistic/supernaturalistic divide? What is lost and what is gained if transpersonal psychologists employ such an
epistemologically and metaphysically pluralistic approach? Might this approach lead to a more flexible, expansive, or liberal open naturalism free from materialism—one that takes seriously the plausibility of subtle dimensions of reality? Could this open naturalism be capable of disrupting Western epistemic violence and fostering a more symmetrical dialogue—perhaps even collaborative inquiry—between transpersonal researchers and the world’s spiritual practitioners? For now, my provisional stance is that each case (knowledge claim) needs to be assessed independently. No a priori or generic hierarchical relationship between so-called naturalist and supernaturalist accounts—and related etic and emic, outsider and insider, Western and non-Western accounts—can be legitimately established to ascertain the most accurate account of what truly transpires in a spiritual or transpersonal event (e.g., a Kalua tantric ritual or a Shipibo ayahuasca ceremony).

There is no methodological reason why transpersonal psychologists cannot research shared external visions. Such a research program could entail the intake of a visionary medicine—such as San Pedro or ayahuasca—by a team of researchers focusing their attention on the possible occurrence of external visions. This type of research could be also developed in collaboration with traditional practitioners such as shamans or healers. At a first stage (preparation), coresearchers would agree to contrast their perceptions both during and after ceremonies while being mindful of peer-pressure influences, unconscious group collusion, and other potential methodological pitfalls (see Heron, 1998). The second stage (journey) would consist of the actual intake of the medicine and ensuing group visionary journey. At a third stage (internal comparison and interpretation), coresearchers would contrast their experiences and search for intersubjective agreement in their visions. Were shared visions identified, coresearchers would discuss their ontological nature from a pluralistic epistemological perspective that would not impose a priori metaphysical limits to the nature of the inquiry outcomes. Multiple methodological standpoints, epistemologies, and metaphysical frameworks could be considered to discern the more appropriate account of the perceived phenomena. At a final stage (external comparison and re-interpretation), coresearchers could look for contrasts between the group’s inquiry outcomes and available Western and non-Western literature about the meaning and ontological nature of the shared visions.

To be sure, actual research is necessary to assess the epistemic fertility and methodological soundness of such a research program. Contra Friedman’s (2002, 2013a) proposal, however, I suggest that transpersonal psychologists should be able to carry out these types of research and still rightfully call themselves psychologists.

**Conclusion**

Transpersonal psychology should indeed encourage scientific studies, but Friedman’s (2002, 2013a) division of labor between a “scientific” transpersonal...
psychology and “nonscientific” transpersonal studies is neither cogent nor salutary. To turn transpersonal psychology into a modern scientific discipline achieves precisely what Friedman seeks to avoid, that is, binding transpersonal psychology to a singular naturalistic worldview with a metaphysical status equivalent to religious supernaturalism. Although transpersonal psychologists should definitively remain vigilant against the infiltration of metaphysical or religious ideologies in the field, scientific naturalism as an alternate ideology should not be the exception. Whereas it might be impossible to carry out scholarship without metaphysical assumptions, it is important to be explicitly self-critical about them and avoid presenting naturalistic science as less metaphysically biased or as the only path to progressive knowledge. The alternative, I propose, is to work with a larger naturalistic-inquiry framework that is open to the viability of a deep and multidimensional cosmos in which modern science’s narrow “naturalistic” world does not necessarily exhaust the possibilities of the real.

Transpersonal scholars should also scrutinize the neo-Kantian assumptions lying beneath skepticism and agnosticism toward the ontological status of certain spiritual realities. It is fundamental to be aware that such a stance, far from warranting neutrality or impartiality, is the fruit of a Western, dualistic, and arguably disembodied epistemological ethos that automatically renders suspect many spiritual claims about the nature of knowledge and reality. In their attempts to promote the scientific legitimacy of the field, some transpersonal psychologists have prematurely committed to a neo-Kantian dualistic epistemology that is in fact ideologically tied to a naturalistic, and often materialistic, metaphysics. Whether such a narrowly conceived naturalistic worldview will ultimately be cogent is unknown (I strongly suspect that it will not), but transpersonal scholars should note the metaphysical presuppositions of such methodological agnosticism; in this way, they can avoid assuming or defending its purportedly metaphysically neutral status and thereby falling prey to one of science’s most prevalent ideologies (van Fraassen, 2002).

As a possible way forward, I have suggested the following steps:

1. recognizing the inevitability of metaphysics in both science and religion;
2. minimizing parochialism via working with inquiry frameworks that are open to both “naturalistic” and “supernaturalistic” accounts of spiritual phenomena even if this approach may ultimately lead to the overcoming of such a binary opposition (e.g., in the form of an open naturalism);
3. developing methodological approaches that dialogically engage emic and etic claims, as well as Western and non-Western epistemologies, in the understanding and assessment of spiritual knowledge claims;
4. approaching religious traditions in the spirit of a participatory pluralism that is open to the ontological richness of religious worlds without reducing them to any single transcendentalist or naturalistic worldview; and
5. critiquing oppressive and repressive inner and outer systems of domination, selfishness, dissociation, and violence within, between, and among human beings, other sentient beings, and the world.

Methodologically, I firmly believe that such an approach calls for transpersonal psychology to embrace empirical (quantitative and qualitative), theoretical (e.g., hermeneutic, comparative, integrative, critical, feminist, postcolonial), and contemplative/visionary methods. As Lancaster (2013) argued, “The defining feature of transpersonal psychology is that it integrates across all the levels [neuroscientific, cognitive and neuropsychological, psychodynamic, and spiritual/mystical] in its approach to understanding the mind and processes of transformation” (p. 225). Following Lancaster’s suggestion, it is time to work towards a metaphysically, epistemologically, and methodologically plural transpersonal psychology that, bridging previously polarized camps (e.g., science and religion, modern and postmodern, or empiricism and hermeneutics), may well become one of the first truly holistic disciplines of the 21st century.

Notes

1 While strongly advocating for quantitative (e.g., psychometric) studies, transpersonal scientists regard most qualitative approaches as scientific (e.g., Friedman, 2013a; MacDonald & Friedman, 2013). I therefore use the terms scientific and empirical interchangeably to include both quantitative and qualitative research.

2 This is in itself a rather peculiar claim: to wit, are not theoretical physicists physicists? Are not the publishing authors in the Journal of Theoretical Biology biologists? Note also that accepting Friedman’s (2002, 2013a) proposal would forbid use of the term psychologies for (a) the many schools of the depth psychological tradition (e.g., classical, contemporary, and intersubjective psychoanalysis; Jungian, analytic, and archetypal psychologies; object-relations theory and self-psychology); (b) the robust nonempirical subfields of contemporary psychology (e.g., theoretical psychology, critical psychology, liberation psychology, or psychology of science); and (c) central elements of evolutionary psychology, ecological psychology, cultural psychology, comparative and cross-cultural psychology, indigenous psychologies, and phenomenological, existential, and hermeneutic psychologies. In this regard, Slife and Williams (1997) listed more than a dozen of academic psychological journals “devoted entirely, or in part, to theoretical work” (p. 125). Finally, it is unclear how Friedman’s scientific transpersonal psychology would be different from disciplines such as the psychology of religion or the scientific study of religion. Despite Friedman’s (2002) de jure pronouncement against such a possibility, his proposal seems inevitably to lead to the gradual dissolution of the field into these mainstream fields—perhaps becoming a kind of fringe subfield dealing with those particular spiritual experiences called transpersonal.

3 Although naturalism is widely regarded today as essential to the modern scientific worldview (e.g., Mahner, 2012; Schoferman, 1997), the association of naturalism and science was largely historically contingent (Bilgrami, 2000; Kubrin, 1980). Science has the potential to operate with supernaturalistic assumptions as evidenced by the many past scientific explanations (even Newton’s) appealing to supernaturalistic factors (Clarke, 2009). For a defense of science’s potential openness to both naturalistic and supernaturalistic worldviews, see Fishman (2007).

4 Although usually hand-in-hand, naturalism and materialism are not synonymous. Whereas all materialists are naturalists of some sort, one can be a naturalist without committing to materialism or to the view that all which truly exists is made of matter. Expanded or liberal forms of naturalism embrace the reality of nonmaterial entities such as numbers, psychological states, and perceptions (see De Caro & MacArthur, 2000, 2004; Nagel, 2012; Schoferman, 1997).

5 My endorsement of van Fraassen’s (2002) account of the ideological status of naturalism and materialism does not mean that I subscribe to his constructive empiricism (2002, 2008), which results in the rejection of all metaphysical considerations about nature and reality. For a cogent rebuttal to van Fraassen’s critique of metaphysics, see Chakravartty (2007, pp. 20–26).

6 Physicalism is a narrower stance than materialism: The latter is the view that only matter exists, and the former holds that the micro-entities studied by physics are ontologically or explanatorily primary (see Dupré, 1993).

7 Nagel (2012) agrees: “Such a world view [reductionist and materialist naturalism] is not a necessary condition of the practice of any of those sciences [biology, chemistry, and physics], and its acceptance or non-acceptance
Naturalism can also be religious in the sense that nature can be understood religiously and evoke religious feelings—for contemporary articulations of religious naturalism, see Crosby (2002), Hague (2010), and Stone (2009). Religious traditions, such as certain Zen schools, that do not posit metaphysical or supernatural referents could also be included within this category. For the medieval origins of the Western distinction between the natural and the supernatural, see Bartlett (2008).

Discussing the scientific dismissal of paranormal evidence, Friedman and Hartelius (2013) made a strikingly similar point: “If a modern metaphysics is imposed on research (cf. Mahner, 2012), then those very aspects of the phenomena will necessarily be discounted a priori, and the knowledge that might be generated from them will be lost. Evidence challenging the de facto metaphysical assumptions that tend to accompany science is disallowed on the grounds that it challenges those assumptions—rather like a judge who refuses to consider a motion to recuse him- or herself” (p. xxv).

This proposal is not new. Daniels (2005) wrote: “As transpersonal psychologists, we should aim to bracket as far as possible ALL metaphysical assumptions in what should essentially become a phenomenological examination of experiences of transformation” (p. 203; see also Daniels, 2001). Similarly, adopting Jung’s neo-Kantianism (Nagy, 1996), Washburn (1995) pointed out: “we simply cannot know … whether the power of the Ground, in addition to being an intrapsychic phenomenon, is also an extrapsychic (metaphysical, cosmic) noumenon” (p. 130). For a transpersonal critique of this position, see Lancaster (2002).

Friedman’s views are strongly reminiscent of Katzian constructivism, whose Jewish leanings have been exposed by religious studies scholars (see Evans, 1989; King, 1999; Smith, 1987). In addition, metaphysical agnosticism has been denounced as “cryptotheological,” or inadvertently perpetuating theological agendas in its implicitly positing a single transcendental referent about which scholars need to remain agnostic (Fitzgerald, 2000).

For critiques of objectivism, see Bernstein (1985), Bordo (1987), and Megill (1994).

But then, why not to go all the way and replace folk psychological language with scientific brain jargon, as Churchland (1986) famously proposed (i.e., talk about neural dynamics instead of beliefs or feelings)? I suspect that Friedman would reject such an eliminative materialist project, but his proposal is congruent with it—especially considering modern science’s allegiance to ontological materialism and reductionism (MacDonald, 2013; Mahner, 2012).

For a thorough account of how Lakoff and Johnson’s (1999) “embodied realism” paves a middle way between objectivism and postmodern relativism in both the sciences and the humanities, see Slingerland (2008). On embodied cognitive science in general, see Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991), Chemero (2009), and Shapiro (2014).

Supporting the ongoing (and arguably highly political) “scientification” and “biologizing” of psychology (e.g., see Slife & Williams, 1997; Tec, 2005; Ward, 2002) that is characteristic, for example, of the American Psychological Association (APA), Friedman (2002, 2013a) sees psychology more as a natural science (like biology, chemistry, and physics) than a social or human science (like anthropology or sociology). In my view, psychology’s focus on socially situated, biologically mediated, and arguably spiritually informed behavior and experience makes the discipline a natural, human, social, and spiritual science—a highly integrative field calling for a plurality of epistemic frameworks and methodological approaches beyond the exclusive scientific empiricism of the natural sciences (cf. Giorgi, 1970; Heron, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1983; Slife & Williams, 1997).
conception of shared epistemic virtues paradoxically delivers “a kind of unity of knowledge” (Dupré, 1993, p. 243).

Incidentally, Friedman (2013a) misapprehended the nature of my participatory proposal as building “silos that separate, abnegating the possibility of finding useful connections” (p. 303) among spiritual traditions that lead to “considering all transpersonal systems as incommensurate” (p. 303). In my work, however, I not only criticized constructivism’s “myth of the framework,” which might lead to such undesirable outcomes (Ferrer, 2000, 2002), but also argued that participatory pluralism allows and even encourages doctrinal, practical, and even ontological hybridizations among traditions (Ferrer, 2010, 2012). Specifically arguing against the radical separateness of spiritual cosmologies that Friedman attributed to my work, I wrote:

My defense of many viable spiritual paths and goals does not preclude the possibility of equivalent or common elements among them. In other words, although the different mystical traditions enact and disclose different spiritual universes, two or more traditions may share certain elements in their paths and/or goals. (Ferrer, 2002, p. 148)

In addition, contra Friedman’s (2013a) suggestion that my proposal leads to the uncritical appraisal of local understandings, a participatory epistemology provides ample resources for the criticism of religious traditions (e.g., Ferrer, 2002, 2008a, 2008b, 2011a; Ferrer & Sherman, 2008b). The participatory endorsement of “the diversity of all spiritual traditions as seen on their own terms” (Friedman, 2013a, p. 303) should be understood not as eschewing criticism, but rather as both avoiding reductionist distortions of such diversity (e.g., by perennialism) and affirming a potential plurality of equally holistic forms of spiritual enactments of self, relationships, and world (Ferrer, 2011b).

21 In this context, Wilber’s (1996) postmetaphysical reduction of spiritual realms to the individual’s interiors fails to bridge the gap (see Ferrer, 2011a; Hartelius & Ferrer, 2014).

22 Although its origins are uncertain, astral doctor is demonstrably an etic term and Indigenous peoples use different local terms to refer to such reportedly nonphysical entities. The Matsigenka of Southern Peru, for example, call their spirit allies Sangarite—those “elusive, luminous beings” that can be seen “under the influence of hallucinogens plants” (Shepard, 2014, p. 23).

23 However, Grof’s (1988) reported transcultural access, in nonordinary states of consciousness, to both the imagery and (the esoteric, at times) meaning of spiritual symbols, rituals, and cosmologies belonging to specific religious worlds without participants’ previous exposure to those symbols arguably challenges such naturalistic reading (see Ferrer, 2002; Ferrer & Sherman, 2008b).

24 For an historical account of the “naturalization” of hallucinations, see Berrios (2005). As Aleman and Larsi (2008) explained, “Increasingly, mystical visions and similar experiences were no longer seen as the communication of supernatural origin. Instead, natural explanations were advanced” (p. 14).

25 The “and/or” of this sentence is crucial, particularly in the context of spiritual inquiry. On the one hand, it may be plausible to consider intersubjective consensus as a central epistemic standard in the context of what I call, paraphrasing Kuhn (1970), a single tradition’s normal spiritual inquiry. In other words, when spiritual practice is managed by a prevailing spiritual paradigm and something akin to a correspondence theory of truth is operative (e.g., between practitioners’ insights and the tradition’s mapped “stages of the path”). On the other hand, it should be obvious that intersubjective agreement is probably an inappropriate test not only among traditions (which bring forth different and often incompatible spiritual insights), but also in periods of revolutionary spiritual inquiry within one tradition, in which anomalies in relation to accepted doctrines arise and new paradigms of spiritual understanding are developed (e.g., it is likely that neither the Buddha’s enlightenment nor the claims of the more radical Christian mystics could have been intersubjectively corroborated in their respective times and contexts). In the latter case, the search for more pragmatic avenues to legitimize spiritual knowledge claims becomes imperative (see Ferrer, 2002, 2011a, 2011b).

26 Similarly, Kripal (2014) recommended the following to students of comparative religion: “We also need to beware of projecting the western categories of the ‘natural’ and the ‘supernatural’ onto religious worlds in which such divisions are simply not operable. We have suggested instead that you employ the category of the ‘super natural’” (p. 172).

27 The use of entheogens as inquiry tools is justified by modern cognitive psychological studies (Shanon, 2002), transpersonal research proposals (Friedman, 2006; Roberts & Hruby, 2002), and Indigenous accounts of the power of entheogens to make subtle entities or phenomena visible (e.g., see Harner, 1973; Sheppard, 2014; Turner, 1992). Interestingly, despite receiving enthusiastic support from transpersonal psychologists for decades, Tart’s (1972) state-specific scientific research program never took off. I strongly suspect that the problem was that accessing deep meditative states in a stable manner, let alone the various visionary realms mapped by religious traditions, can take an entire life of practice. Put bluntly, we have the maps and the vehicle but not the fuel. Given the widely documented access to spiritual states and realms entheogens provide (see, e.g., Grof, 1985; Merkur 1998; Shanon, 2002; Strassman, 2001), I suggest that Tart’s program could be revitalized by the cautious but systematic use of entheogens as inquiry tools. Despite the current revival of governmentally sanctioned psychedelic research (Friedman, 2006; Roberts & Winkelman, 2013), the use of most entheogens in the United States is still illegal, so this proposal should be seen as strictly epistemological and by no means recommending unlawful research.


SHAPIN, S. (2010). *Never pure: Studies in science as if it was carried out by people with bodies, gender, situated in time and space, and struggling with credibility and authority*. Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press.


The Author

Jorge N. Ferrer, Ph.D., is core faculty of the department of East-West Psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), San Francisco. He is the award-winning author of *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory: A Participatory Vision of Human Spirituality* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002) and *Participation and Spirit: Transpersonal Essays in Psychology, Education, and Religion* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, forthcoming), as well as the coeditor (with Jacob H. Sherman) of *The Participatory Turn: Spirituality, Mysticism, Religious Studies* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008). In 2009, he became an advisor to the organization Religions for Peace at the United Nations on a research project aimed at solving global interreligious conflict. He was born in Barcelona, Spain. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to the author at jferrer@ciis.edu.
CREATIVE TRANSCENDENCE: MEMOIR WRITING FOR TRANSFORMATION AND EMPOWERMENT

Diana Raab, Ph.D.
Santa Barbara, CA

ABSTRACT: Inspired by the researcher’s experiences as a memoir writer, this qualitative narrative inquiry research study examined the transformative and empowering dynamics of writing a memoir in connection with transcendent/pivotal experiences. The study was informed by Maslow’s theory of creativity and metamotivation. The five participants were esteemed writers with at least one full-length memoir. The study offered a comprehensive profile of each participant showing the relevance of writing as a transpersonal practice. Data collection included memoir excerpts, interviews, lectures, and observations. Data analysis was done using thematic analysis. The findings contribute to the ongoing knowledge of writing as a transpersonal practice. The results illustrate the transformative and empowering dynamics of writing a full-length memoir. The writing experience offered the participants a chance to review their lives, find resolution and redemption, find inner peace, and establish the clarity of mind to move forward in their lives.

KEYWORDS: memoir, transformative writing, empowerment, creative transcendence, transcendent experiences, Abraham Maslow, B-(being) creativity, D-(deficiency) creativity, metamotivation.

When I was 10 years old, my grandmother committed suicide in the room next to mine. More than four decades later, after my first cancer diagnosis, I realized what a transformative event that had been. This awareness set me on a path to discover the reason my grandmother took her life and resulted in two published memoirs, Regina’s Closet: Finding My Grandmother’s Secret Journal and Healing With Words: A Writer’s Cancer Journey that helped me understand, grow, and become empowered. This study examined the transcendent or pivotal experiences that inspire memoir writing for transformation and empowerment in esteemed writers. Many memoir writers choose this genre as a way to find or reclaim their voice, share a family secret, or tell a story. The act or experience of writing brings a sense of awareness, a transformed identity, and a deeper understanding of the individual writer’s place in the world (Krippner, 2002; Yagelski, 2009).

In his discussion of creativity, Csikszentmihalyi (1996) said, “The real work begins when the emotion or idea that sprang from the uncharted regions of the psyche is held up to the light of reason … it is here that craft comes into play” (p. 263). The decision to write a memoir is dependent upon both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that are illuminated by pivotal or transcendent experiences. The intrinsic factors may relate to the individual’s emotions, and the extrinsic factors are illuminated by pivotal or transcendent experiences. The intrinsic factors may pertain to what occurs in his or her world. Writing about certain

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diana@dianaraab.com

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experiences helps provide an understanding of one’s unique self, as well as one’s relationship with others and the world-at-large.

Maslow’s (1971) theory of motivation informed this study in that in writing a memoir an individual might be motivated by higher means or higher truths. “They are dedicated people, devoted to some task ‘outside themselves,’ some vocation, or duty, or beloved job” (Maslow, 1971, p. 291). This metamotivation may be connected to a calling, daimon, mission, or life purpose or what inspires the self-actualized individual. This metamotivation may be connected to what Maslow calls B- (being) creativity or creativity that arises from being motivated by a higher level of growth. The other type of creativity coined by Maslow is called D- (deficiency) creativity and is a type of creativity that arises from an individual needing to fill a gap due to an unmet primary need or the need for affirmation, acceptance and/or love.

In lieu of presenting a problem, this study presented an opportunity to examine the transcendent or pivotal experiences that encourage individuals to choose memoir writing to transform, grow, and become empowered. The transcendent event may be seen as a unique experience that can confirm or affirm an individual’s identity. The purpose of this study was to examine and interpret the transformative dynamics of writing a memoir as elicited by transcendent or pivotal experiences, or transformation and empowerment, resulting in an interpretation of the experience. A transcendent experience is defined as an experience that goes beyond the ordinary. Additionally, this study aimed to contribute to the field of knowledge in this area by facilitating another level of processing after an individual has written a memoir.

Compelling memoirs that express profound emotions and utilize embodied writing may become powerful tools for transformation, as both the writer and the reader become more aware, reflective, connected, and inquisitive about the transcendent experience or pivotal experience that inspired the writing of the memoir. In most cases, an individual writes a memoir because of a burning need to share one’s story or as a way to figure something out in one’s life, and in some cases, to bring a voice to a family secret or event. Pennebaker (1993, 1997a, 1997b) has conducted numerous studies on the therapeutic power of writing. He found that when using expressive writing or journaling about upsetting experiences, that narratives might not have been initially coherent, but with ongoing writing, the narratives became even more coherent (Pennebaker, 1993). This is indicative of the transformative and empowering qualities of engaging a larger writing project such as a memoir. However, as far as I have learned from my research, there seems to be a minimal amount of empirical literature supporting the transformative and empowering dynamics of memoir writing that is inspired by pivotal or transcendent experiences.

**Method**

The research method used for this study was narrative inquiry. The data were gathered via spoken and written communication with the participants, who
shared the transformative dynamics elicited by pivotal and transcendent experiences that inspired them to write a memoir. This method allowed for the in-depth study of lived experiences by describing, clarifying, and bringing awareness to a lived experience, while providing a deeper understanding of individuals and their truths in a way that objective or quantitative studies cannot so easily achieve. As the researcher, I read and listened to each participant’s story and was attentive to any resonance that offered a universal truth (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Freeman, 2007; Hinton, 2012; Polkinghorne, 2005).

In narrative inquiry, the participants recall the lived experience and, with the researcher, coproduce it. In this way, the researcher’s interview questions are as important as the participant’s responses. In creating the interview questions, the researcher becomes an integral and visible part of the research and results. Even after the published memoirs were read, an open-ended dialogue occurred between each participant and me, an exchange that offered deeper and richer insights into the transformative dynamics of writing a memoir. Narrative inquiry lends itself to the use of a more creative literary style of writing. My personal interest in narrative provided the opportunity to interview peer memoir writers. There was a merging of the data while corroborating the analysis of my own story with that of the participants’ stories. The narratives were crafted from the data by the use of reflexive, participatory, and aesthetic processes. The interviews and published memoirs provided indirect evidence regarding the research topic (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Leavy, 2009; Polkinghorne, 2005).

The main research questions addressed in this study were: What are the transformative dynamics of writing a memoir elicited by a pivotal or transcendent experience? What are the pivotal or transcendent experiences that inspire memoir writing for transformation and empowerment in esteemed writers? What is the impact of the pivotal or transcendent experiences in terms of an individual’s life theme? How are those experiences representative of Maslow’s theory of metamotivation, B- (being) creativity and D- (deficiency) creativity?

The philosophical assumption of this study primarily entailed the transpersonal paradigm and also incorporated certain aspects of the constructivist view. The purpose of the transpersonal paradigm or approach to research was to expand, enrich, integrate, unify, awaken, enlighten, transcend, and transform both the researcher and the participant. In this paradigm, the researcher’s qualities and sensibilities played a critical role in all the phases of research. In fact, my role as the researcher was emphasized in the transpersonal paradigm, particularly since I already had familiarity with the area of study and was part of the measuring instrument. In addressing the transpersonal paradigm, emphasis was placed on the researcher’s and participants’ personal knowledge gained through intuition, direct knowing, empathy, and other paranormal means. The study, therefore, explored and honored the utilization of alternate modes of knowing.
Narratives are especially important in the transpersonal paradigm because they form the core of “nuances of our personal identities” (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p. 23). In the act of sharing these nuances, a story is told, a past is remembered, and insights are formed as a way to cast a light on a lived experience. By sharing narratives the participants became more aware of their pivotal or transcendent experience. Thus, as Braud & Anderson stated, “a more fully enriched spiritual awareness seems not only possible but more probable” (p. 24).

Another pertinent aspect of the transpersonal paradigm is the importance of interconnectedness—the acknowledgment of shared multiple realities that were accomplished through dialogue and an exchange of information between the researcher and participants. Thus, the relationship becomes interactive, a quality of relationship that will further emphasize the equal terrain on which both participant and researcher stand (Braud & Anderson, 1998).

With the transpersonal paradigm, this researcher studied the various transcendent experiences that inspired individuals to write memoir to transform and become empowered at the center of this process. As a researcher, I concur with Braud and Anderson (1998), who believe that, although a large part of our knowledge is received through sense data validated by others, other forms of knowing also offer an opportunity to gain knowledge.

The constructivist worldview complements the transpersonal paradigm because, for data collection, it uses methods such as observations, interviews, and document reviews, which included the reading of the participants’ published memoirs. The goal of this worldview is for individuals to understand the world in which we live. The assumption here is that the researcher and participant would recall, collect, examine, and interpret data, and would then socially construct conclusions explicit in the narratives: “The constructivist therefore opts for a more personal, interactive mode of data collection” (Mertens, 2005, p. 15).

After collection via interviews, reading the memoirs, and lectures, the data were connected to a broad spectrum of theoretical frameworks. This was one way to interpret and analyze the data. Each story was analyzed individually for particular elements; then similarities, differences, and common themes were identified (Murray, 2011).

**Participants**

The five participants were chosen via purposeful sampling, thus providing a rich blend of information, “with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 104). The participants had all written a memoir that referenced them having had a pivotal or transcendent experience that moved them to write either one or two memoirs. The experience of writing the memoir should have been transformative and empowering to the participant. In order to initiate this purposeful selection, I read a selection of memoirs from both emerging and esteemed (well-published author with at least one published book) writers.
At the onset of this study, as a researcher, I identified potential participants by gathering names from published memoir reviews, such as in *Publisher’s Weekly*, *Poets and Writers*, *Salon*, and *The Sunday New York Times Book Review*. E-mails were also sent to literary colleagues for suggestions of writers who had written a memoir that dealt with the subject of loss—whether referencing the loss of a loved one, health, or status. The intention was not to study loss, but loss was used as a participant criterion as a way to narrow down the number of potential memoirs to be studied; otherwise the list of possible memoirs would have been too extensive.

The potential participant list began with nearly 34 memoirists. Utilizing the process of elimination, the list was narrowed down to 25 participants and finally to five participants. Then, I read each memoir (some participants had written two memoirs) to ensure their pertinence to the study. When the preferred memoirs were chosen, e-mails were sent advising the memoirist of the nature and essence of the research study, and what it would involve for him or her. For example, the participants were advised that they would be interviewed three times via phone or Skype over a 3-month period, at mutually agreeable times.

The final participant profile included (a) age range between 35 and 75; (b) three females and two males; (c) two out of the five participants had written two memoirs; (d) all participants were esteemed writers; (e) all participants had transcendent or pivotal experiences that led them to write a memoir; and (f) at least four participants acknowledged that they were transformed and empowered by writing a memoir.

The first participant to consent to the study was Kim Stafford, the son of the esteemed poet William Stafford, who had also written a memoir about his brother’s suicide. The second participant to agree was Mark Matousek, who had written two memoirs. The third participant was Monica Wesolowska, who almost immediately agreed to participate in the study. The fourth participant to respond was Alexandra Styron, the daughter of the writer William Styron. The fifth agreeing to participate was Maxine Hong Kingston. Note: All participants chosen for this study opted out of remaining anonymous and gave permission for their names to be published.

Thus, all the memoirs chosen for this study were written by well-published or esteemed writers. Purely by coincidence, all five participants were also teachers of either creative or transformative writing. Admittedly, these memoirists were chosen because their memoirs were the most compelling and well-written contemporary memoirs.

**Procedure**

Personalized letters were e-mailed to each participant describing the research project as a narrative qualitative study examining the pivotal or transcendent experiences that led each individual to undertake the project of writing a memoir. In the initial letter to each participant, the transpersonal term of
transcendent experiences was explained, and it was mentioned again on the Informed Consent form. This study employed integral research skills with intention setting, while using mindfulness techniques for both the researcher and participant. The participants were offered the opportunity to share any other alternate states of knowing, such as lectures, journal entries, or any other forms of creative expression.

Two interviews were conducted with each participant. Although a great deal of information and answers to the research questions were easily obtained by reading the participants’ memoirs, the interviews validated and allowed for a deeper connection between the researcher and the participants.

Prior to the first interview with each participant, this researcher read each memoir twice. Research questions were customized to each memoirist, although left open-ended so that the discussion could be guided by each participant. To ground and calm the participant, each interview began with a breathing exercise, followed by a 5-minute guided meditation.

The first interview began with an orientation, stating intention and rationale for the study, and sharing the length and focus of the discussion (Mishler, 1999). Each participant was informed of my deep interest in his or her memoir, while also sharing my own transcendent experiences and the transformative dynamics of my memoir writing. The second interview was a continuation of the first, and ended by asking if the participant had anything to add, comment on, or share.

The details and contents of the interviews were based on a combination of two interviewing approaches: McAdams’ (1997) Life Story Interview, which is a guided autobiography method wherein the individual constructs the life story, identifying pivotal experiences in his or her life; and the Self-Defining Memory Task developed by Singer and Moffitt (1991), wherein self-defining emotional memories are linked together by a theme in the individual’s life (Winston, 2011). These elicited emotional memories are “affectively charged, repetitive, and linked to other similar memories. They are also connected to an important theme of enduring concern in a person’s life story” (Winston, 2011, p. 120).

This new interview method, which I called Transcendent Experiences and Life Themes, included making the following inquiries: the presence of peak experiences, nadir (low) experiences, pivotal experiences, exceptional human experiences, aha moments, and the role that writing continues to play in the participant’s life. The participant was then asked about the impact of these events on his or her personal transformation and sense of empowerment.

Prior to the first interview, each participant received via e-mail an Informed Consent to participate in the study. For the purpose of data treatment, the participants had the option to remain anonymous, but none of them chose do so. The interviews were semi-structured.
Ethical considerations involved the minimization of the risks and the enhancement of the benefits to all the participants. Because the criteria for participant selection entailed having written a published memoir, the ethical considerations regarding confidentiality were minimal.

To minimize the issue of researcher bias, I shared and reflected about my connection with the subject of research and my own experience with pivotal and transcendent experiences that led to the writing of my two memoirs, Regina’s Closet: Finding Her Grandmother’s Secret Journal and Healing With Words: A Writer’s Cancer Journey. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) suggested that the researcher keep a journal of subjective perspectives and biases to be recorded during the research process; I did regular journaling during, before, and after the actual data collection. While writing up the data, I contacted a couple of the participants for clarification on specific information.

To ensure accuracy and efficiency of data collection, the triangulation method was used, wherein multiple analytical processes are used to create a greater understanding of the meaning of research. The primary methods of data collection were through interviews, reading of and reviewing the participants’ memoirs, and researcher’s observation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Interviews were conducted via live meetings, taped phone interviews, and Skype.

Numerous validity measures were also utilized. First, to address credibility (internal validity), peer debriefing was used. For that process, the findings were presented to other memoir writers who were not involved in this study. The nature and findings of the study were also discussed with a colleague not writing a memoir, but who works in an academic environment and teaches writing at the college level. Those consulted were impressed by the study’s results and asked helpful questions that illuminated some of the study’s major reliability issues. Second, transferability (external validity) was used, wherein rich and poignant descriptions of the research findings were shared. The more details presented in the study, the more trustworthy and reliable the narrative appeared.

The reflexive voice, as described by Hertz (1997), allows for this deep conversation with the self by incorporating the individual’s body, mind, and spirit in the writing process. In fact, sometimes during the writing process, the individual utilizes a transpersonal technique whereby the body takes over and the writer becomes entranced and involved in reliving the experience. This involvement may result in transformation for the memoirist (Anderson, 2001; Ellis, 2004; Goodall, 2000; Haynes, 2011).

For compelling readability, embodied, reflective, and reflexive writing was employed. Third, a test of dependability (reliability) was utilized. This is the place where the methods overlap, addressing credibility and employing triangulation, stepwise replication, and inquiry audit. My self-reflections were shared regarding the narrative with the hope that my insights would resonate and move the readers. Fourth, confirmability (objectivity) was also addressed and, when possible, extended time was spent with each participant, either in

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person, via Skype, or on the phone. During the data collection stage, I maintained a reflexive journal. Fifth, member checking was utilized. After the interviews were transcribed and the data analyzed, additional communication was arranged with each participant, as a way to allow him or her to review the document for accuracy.

**RESULTS**

Based on the four research questions, the following findings resulted:

**Transcendent or Pivotal Experiences that Inspired Memoir Writing for Transformation and Empowerment in all the Participants.**

For Stafford, the pivotal moment for writing his memoir was his older brother Bret’s suicide at the age of 40. He had never written about his brother, but realized that over the years much of the dialogue and narrative he had written in his journals were connected to or in the voice of his brother. Therefore, his brother's suicide was his inspiration to write his memoir, *100 Tricks Every Boy Can Do*. As he emphasized “painful acts like suicide, and mysterious life dimensions like depression, tend to call forth both indelible memories and a velvet cloak of silence” (Stafford, 2012, p. 194). The moment of the final decision to begin writing his memoir occurred when Stafford’s son transitioned into adolescence, and Stafford began to wonder about the circumstances surrounding his brother’s suicide. Stafford wanted to be aware of the secrets, silences, and the predisposition for depression in his family, as all those factors could have an impact on his only son.

Memoirist Matousek (1996) claimed that his inspiration for writing his first memoir, *Sex Death Enlightenment*, stemmed from his transcendent experience of the realization that his life as a busy writer for a large New York magazine was taking a psychological toll on him. He felt a deep desire and need to slow down his life from the fast track. It was as if a voice inside him gave him this message. What this meant for Matousek was the need for a mystical and spiritual exploration. It was during his personal mystical and spiritual exploration that he found himself transforming. By writing *Sex Death Enlightenment*, he wanted to share with the universe the details and evolution of his transformation.

Matousek’s (2000) impetus for writing his second memoir, *The Boy He Left Behind*, originated from the pivotal or transcendent moment of when his father abandoned Matousek’s family when he was 4 years old, leaving him to live with three sisters and his mother—essentially a house of women who silenced him. The real impact of that moment arrived when his father returned years later and unsuccessfully tried to kidnap him.

Wesolowska’s (2013) transcendent moment arrived when she gave birth to Silvan, who clearly would not survive too long after birth. Just after his birth,
Wesolowska began keeping a journal sharing her experience. Already a writer, it was clear this loss would lead her to write the story of Silvan’s life, and that this would both help heal her and empower her realization that if you love someone you need to let them go—thus her inspiration to write *Holding Silvan*.

Styron (2011) was a little different than the other memoirists because although she had written a novel, her primary profession was as an actor. As the only one in her family who had inherited the literary gene, she felt compelled to share her father’s story. In addition to being inspired to study, write, and share her father’s life story and what growing up in the same house with him was like, she was also driven by grander motivations of exploring the human heart and psyche; thus the title, *Reading My Father*.

Kingston’s (1975) transcendent experiences or inspiration for writing her two memoirs were not necessarily from one clearly identifiable moment, but stemmed from her reflection about what had historically happened within her family. *The Woman Warrior* was inspired by the ghosts of her Chinese past, particularly her aunt’s suicide after being ostracized from the community for having an illegitimate child. The fact that her aunt was born and forgotten from the family grated on Kingston’s psyche for many years. While her mother wanted her to communicate stories with the world, Kingston was told to hold on to the secret about her aunt’s suicide. Kingston wrote *The Woman Warrior* as a way to explore this duality. Kingston’s impetus for writing *The Fifth Book of Peace* was the Berkeley fires, causing the burning of her 200-page book manuscript. Kingston believes that through stories we find reconciliation with our past.

The Transformative Dynamics of Writing a Memoir

Stafford indicated that writing his memoir transformed him in the sense that it helped him come to new understandings about his brother’s suicide. It also reunited him with his brother in a way that made him feel younger because he was reliving their childhood experiences together. At the same time, the writing inspired him to dig deeper into understanding his own life. The writing forced him to pose questions and encouraged him to tell stories. Most importantly, Stafford realized that relationships do not end with death; they go on forever, and sometimes they can even become magnified after someone has died.

Matousek was immediately transformed and relieved from the pain of his past when he began writing. Growing up as the only boy amongst three sisters, Matousek never felt as if his voice was heard. Writing his memoirs gave him a voice. While writing *The Boy He Left Behind*, Matousek came to the realization that as a child without a father living at home he felt as if a part of him was missing, but in writing his memoir he understood that that there was no reason to feel that way. Thus, writing dissipated his feelings and helped him feel more real in his own skin than he had ever felt before.

Wesolowska wrote *Holding Silvan* with a deep sense of flow and urgency, and this alone was transformative. Writing about her experience with Silvan’s
short life and untimely death helped her look at life in a much larger context, especially since she wrote it after she had birthed two other sons. Writing also helped to keep Silvan alive in her mind and in her heart. Completing the memoir brought closure to his life and birth. The writing transformed her and helped her move into the next phase of her life of raising two healthy boys.

Styron felt transformed while writing her memoir because the writing process gave her confidence in her story, which she was telling about her father. She also found that while writing, undesirable memories of her past that had been swept away were brought to the forefront. Styron realized that rather than being a form of transformation, retelling her father’s stories was a way to manage her false sense of intimacy with him, in that she held onto satisfying snippets of information as a mirror into his life.

Kingston admitted to having been transformed by retelling the stories of her past. She also enjoyed examining and exploring unknown territories. She felt as if she had had a lost childhood and by writing about it, she was able to understand her past and move forward. During the writing process Kingston had many animal visions that shed light on her life. In addition, she realized that the lost manuscript of *The Fifth Book of Peace* had also burnt many years ago in China, and she pondered the coincidence of these two events.

The Impact of the Pivotal Transcendent Experience on an Individual’s Life Theme

Stafford’s life theme has always been Kuleana, or the freedom to tell stories and the importance of communication. When he realized that he could tell the story of his brother’s life and suicide, he experienced a certain amount of freedom. Writing *100 Tricks Every Boy Can Do* encouraged him to pose even more questions about his brother’s life and ultimate suicide. He began questioning the effect his parents had on his brother’s demise. He also wondered how he might be a better father than his father may have been to his brother and honor the importance of transparency and open communication.

Like Stafford, Matousek’s life theme has greatly revolved around posing questions and seeking answers. Matousek also acknowledged that the themes in both his memoirs focused on his deep sense of spiritual hunger. Along with this came a sense of wonderment about how to deal with this hunger in the most productive and effective manner. He came to the realization that survivors are seekers.

Wesolowska had always been a journal keeper, so pulling together the story of Silvan’s life was in line with her life theme as a creative writer. Wesolowska, Stafford, and Matousek are believers in transparency, and this clearly was illustrated in all of their writing. Wesolowska also acknowledged the beauty inherent to all of life’s stages—birth, dying, and death.
Writing *Reading My Father* reminded Styron of her genetic predisposition to depression and madness. She also understood her deep psychic connection with her father and their mutual sense of humor that she tried to incorporate into the narrative of her book. Another theme in Styron’s life has been the presence of some sort of intrinsic or extrinsic drama inherent in her family’s everyday existence.

**The Role of Maslow’s Theory of Metamotivation in Connection with B-Creativity and D-Creativity**

Sometimes there is a blurring of the boundaries between both B- and D-creativity, especially when discussing writers born of famous writers, such as Stafford and Styron. They may very well have been born with the creative gene and the propensity to express themselves on the page, but perhaps they did not feel it possible until the time was right, such as when faced with a transcendent or pivotal moment. In Stafford’s case, it was the death of his brother and for Styron, the death of her father, both powerful turning points in their lives. Even though the decision to write their memoirs did not necessarily occur immediately following the experience, the idea might have been stirring in their minds.

Although both Stafford and Styron were already writers when their transcendent experiences occurred, it might be assumed that their creativity was in the B-creativity realm, but transcended to the D-creativity realm. In other words, they both used their skills as writers to help themselves deal with and find peace with their losses; thus, the idea of writing a memoir was connected to what Maslow defined as D-creativity.

Matousek is very inspired by higher forces and aspirations. In sharing his own personal journey and transformation with the universe, he felt as if he was working for the higher good. In this way, he is metamotivated; his work may have originated from D-creativity and the belief that he needed to share his story because of the loss of his father. During the writing process, this D-creativity led to B-creativity because the more he wrote, the more he realized how dependent his existence was on sharing his story with the universe.

As a writing instructor, Wesolowska has been a huge inspiration for emerging and accomplished writers. She believes in transformation and healing through words. Although she did begin writing in her journal during childhood, it is unclear whether she began writing out of D-creativity or a desire to write and share her words. Like many writers, she may be one who oscillates back and forth between these realms.

Kingston was metamotivated in the sense that she wanted to share the stories of her Chinese culture. She began writing from a D-creativity perspective and ended up writing from a B-creativity perspective, in that once she started writing and sharing her messages, she realized that the written word was an integral part of who she was and that she was writing for a higher purpose: to share her story with the universe.
Clearly, these findings bring forth similarities amongst the five participants and their stories. For example, the theme of secrecy runs through all their stories, which felt uncomfortable to them. All five participants preferred following the path of transparency as a way to transformation and empowerment. There seems to be a predicament between secrecy and reconciliation in these emotionally charged families where conflicting messages were relayed, especially to the offspring. Perhaps these writers chose to write memoir as a form of reconciliation of the tenuous conditions of their childhoods and/or their individual lived experiences.

**DISCUSSION**

This qualitative narrative study gathered data from five published writers—three women and two men, all ranging between the ages of 45 and 75, who had written a full-length memoir inspired by a pivotal or transcendent experience. The chosen memoirs were connected in some way to loss, although the focus of the memoir was not specifically about loss. Merely by coincidence, all five participants were creative writing instructors.

When the participants were asked to look back on the transcendent experience that served as inspiration for writing the memoir, all were able to identify the experiences that ultimately became the memoir’s focus. Stafford was inspired by his brother’s suicide and wanting to be aware of the secrets and silences within his family; Matousek was inspired by his father abandoning him when he was 4 years old; Wesolowska was inspired by the loss of her son; Styron was inspired by wanting to examine the large picture of her relationship with her father; and Kingston was inspired by her aunt’s hidden suicide and the ghosts of her Chinese past.

When the participants were asked about the transformative dynamics of writing a memoir, Stafford had three offerings. He admitted that writing helped him come to a new understanding about his brother’s suicide; it also inspired him to dig deeper into his own life, while coming to the realization that relationships do not end with death. Matousek found that writing gave him the voice he never had as a child; he also realized that even though his father abandoned him, a piece of him was not missing, as he had thought for so many years. Wesolowska found that writing helped her see her son, Silvan, in the larger context of her life, and that writing also brought her a sense of closure to Silvan’s life so that she could move into the next phase of her own life. Styron found that writing her memoir gave her confidence in the story she set out to write, and that when writing, her memories became even clearer. Kingston admitted to having been transformed by retelling the stories of her past, and also by examining unknown territories. She also felt that by retelling the stories she was able to reclaim her lost childhood.

When the participants were asked about the role of the transcendent experience and their life theme, Stafford admitted that his passion for writing was connected to his love of Kuleana, or the freedom to tell stories. He also acknowledged that the secret surrounding his brother’s suicide simply needed
to be told. Matousek admitted that his life theme had always revolved around posing questions, in addition to his eternal spiritual hunger. Writing both his memoirs served as a continuation of these themes. Wesolowska had always believed in honesty and transparency, and telling Silvan’s story allowed her to maintain this desire. Also, as an individual who likes making connections, writing allowed Wesolowska to make connections to the losses of her past. Kingston and Wesolowska are both women who enjoy storytelling, so memoir writing was an integral and important element of their life themes. Wesolowska admitted that once she made the decision to begin the memoir, she experienced a sense of flow with her words, as if they originated from a very deep place.

All five participants were similar in their desire for transparency and revealing secrets. They all conceded that secrets made them feel uncomfortable and ill at ease. For each one, the resolution came forth when the secrets were exposed, which ultimately led to transformation and empowerment. There was clearly a relationship between secrecy and reconciliation in all 5 participants, and writing the memoir was a way to find resolution in regard to the transcendent experience.

In addition to these findings, five common themes emerged from the data:

1. The five participants expressed a deep need to write a memoir, feeling as if they were the only one able to share this story that needed to be told. It was as if each one was called to write the story. In other words, writing and sharing the story was something they had to get out of their systems.

2. All the participants identified themselves as curious and inquisitive individuals who yearned for knowing and understanding the lived transcendent experience.

3. All participants had implicitly or explicitly confessed that one of the reasons they made the decision to write a memoir was the desire to figure something out, whether it was an unanswered question or the truth about a situation.

4. By writing the memoir(s), all five participants suggested that they could finally let go of the story. During or after writing the memoir, all the participants alluded to the fact that writing was a way to come to terms with or resolution about the pivotal or transcendent experience. In doing so, they each attained spiritual and/or personal strength through transformation and a sense of empowerment.

5. All participants concluded that in researching and writing the memoir, they were offered the opportunity to make connections with others who shared valuable information. This sense of interconnectedness brought a deep sense of comfort and a sense of fulfillment. All the participants viewed making vital connections as one of the many positive aspects of memoir writing.

**Results in Relation to the Literature Review**

Stories unite us; therefore, the purpose of narrative is to express and share stories. “Autobiographic narrative teaches you how to express what you’ve experienced,
what you feel, what you remember, what you understand, who you are, what you believe and why, in a way that someone else would relish reading” (Rainer, 1997, p. 8). The narratives developed by this study clearly illustrate that narrative writing, especially as seen in the writing of a full-length memoir, can help individuals move forward and become transformed and empowered during and after the writing process. Mishara (1995) claimed that narrating difficult experiences through the written word is an act of self-transcendence, and one way for an individual to embody an experience and help to organize it in the context of his or her life. Numerous books and papers have been written on the healing power of writing in general, particularly journaling, but not much has been written on the transformative role of writing a full-length memoir. This study offers to place the transformational power of memoir writing within the existing literature.

The best memoirs have been written by those who have allowed enough distance between the transcendent experience and the writing of their memoirs. This distance provides a much appreciated additional perspective. According to Freeman (1993), when an individual rewrites an experience, especially in the form of a memoir, it offers the opportunity to give a new meaning to a lived experience by understanding it with the present-day lens. As May (1975) identified, the insights offered by looking backward on a life “emerge not chiefly because they are ‘rationally true’ or even helpful, but because they have a certain form, the form that is beautiful because it completes an incomplete Gestalt” (p. 68).

Many writers believe that memoir cannot be properly written until middle age, when there is not only enough distance from the story to be written, but also the wisdom of the adult perspective and prophecy. In her book, Your Life as Story, Rainer (1997) admitted that she did not even feel the impulse to write a memoir until she was 40. The distance, Freeman (2007) claimed, most often allows the experience to come across more coherently on the page. Freeman (2010) added this about hindsight: “Even when I least expect it, a new experience or piece of information may come along that will utterly and completely transform my understanding of the past and the story I tell about it” (p. 85).

The fact that all the participants were inquisitive and had a passion for posing questions might suggest a personality trait inherent to writers. In discussing the creative genius, Hale (1995) stated that the writer is able to combine the intellectual sophistication of years of learning coupled with the wonder and curiosity of a child who is unafraid to pose questions. Posing questions is inherent to wanting to understand these lived experiences. In the discussion of the memoirists wanting to figure something out in their lives, Frank (1995) wisely stated that “the postmodern memoirist writes to discover what other selves were operating, unseen, in a story that is the writer’s own, but that writer is several selves” (p. 70). This figuring out and understanding informs the transformative and empowering aspects of writing a memoir.

The deep questioning of the self in trying to understand the transcendent experience leads to deep conversation with the self, which was reflected in the participants’ writing.
Another factor to consider is the connection between the desire to be creative and the desire to share that creativity, whether it is memoir writing, poetry, or art. This desire to share is connected to Maslow’s metamotivation and an individual’s desire to do something for humanity or the collective. In other words, the transformational pull may be as much social as individual. When metamotivated by higher means, the writer’s motive is to do something for the good of the collective, and sharing the stories of pivotal or transcendent experiences does just that. By witnessing and sharing stories, both the writer and the reader attain benefits. As DasGupta and Hurst (2007) suggested, without sharing the stories, the participant’s life experiences would have remained private. In the event of suffering or illness, the individual might have suffered alone. Therefore, the act of sharing can be transformative and empowering. In fact, Maslow (1970) suggested that those who are self-actualized are those who experience situations in the best way, are the most compassionate, and play a large role in informing and reforming others. In this sense, the self-actualization characteristic of memoir writers can be understood as metamotivation to affect the collective; memoir does this by informing, transforming, and empowering both the memoirist and the reader.

The participants in this study appeared metamotivated, indicating that they were already self-actualized, or the type of individuals who made the most of their potential and intellect. This motivation by higher means was indicative of a desire to solve unknown problems or find answers to unanswered questions. Maslow’s (1962/2011) description of self-actualizers adds depth to this understanding; he described such individuals as “relatively unfrightened by the unknown, the mysterious, the puzzling, and often are positively attracted by it, i.e., selectively put it out to puzzle over, to meditate on and to be absorbed with” (p. 108). This lack of fear transcends the relationship with themselves and their relationships with others. Having no fear meant that the participants were unafraid of their own behavior, emotions, or thoughts, and more than most, they were self-accepting of themselves and others.

The sense of spiritual growth or transformation leads to the transpersonal relevance of the research, in the sense that this deep need to write memoir is framed as self-actualization within Maslow’s understanding of human potential. The concept of self-actualization supports the achievement of human potential as a way to well-being and a sense of harmony. Clearly, both self-actualization and creativity, as demonstrated through the writing of memoir, are connected to psychological well-being and interdependent upon each other. Sometimes, in fact, it might be difficult to ascertain which preceded the other—is the creative individual self-actualized or is the self-actualized individual creative? Runco, Ebersole, and Mraz (1997) suggested that, in fact, both self-actualization and creativity may lead to even a third variable, such as the ability to cope and adapt, and that both creativity and self-actualization are multifaceted and dependent upon other variables. However, in either case, both creativity and self-actualization affect the ability of an individual to achieve his or her human potential, which thus explains the transpersonal relevance of this study.
Lajoie and Shapiro (1992) defined transpersonal psychology as “the study of humanity’s highest potential, and with the recognition, understanding, and realization of unitive, spiritual, and transcendent states of consciousness” (p. 91). Creative expression may be considered a transcendent state, and in general, fosters a healthy balance between the mind, body, and spirit. This study is transpersonal from its utility for an individual in achieving the highest potential or becoming metamotivated through the writing process.

Writing as a transpersonal practice has been well established; other researchers, such as Dufrechou (2002) and Netzer (2008), used the practice with themselves and the participants in their studies, incorporating embodied writing in their descriptions. In my particular study, the embodied writing and descriptions came directly from the published memoirs being studied. Memoir writing as a creative expression is useful as a transpersonal practice because it increases self-awareness, promotes healing, is transformative, and elicits feelings of empowerment. Memoir writing can incorporate transpersonal methods such as reflective, reflexive, and embodied writing. By incorporating the technique of embodied writing, the transcendent experience gets embodied and nourished by its presence in and of the world in which we live.

Anderson and Braud (2011), in their discussion of embodied writing, highlighted the idea that our experiences are relayed from the inside to the outside; by using words and vivid images as a vehicle, the memoirist invites sympathetic resonance in the readers. In this way, the readers feel the pulse of the story being told, as if they are reliving details of the experience, emotions, and feelings with the writer. In other words, the reader is invited to be present with the memoirist in the experience. Each writer does this in his or her own creative way, which is why each writer has his or her own distinctive voice when describing a lived experience.

The most compelling writers slow down and look for resonance within their own bodies, as they try to relive an experience and all its nuances. This technique is particularly relevant in memoir writing when the memoirist is often called upon to recall an event that might have happened many years earlier. Consequently, the use of embodied writing is a vital way to “bring the story home” to both the reader and the writer and becomes one way for the memoirist to portray his or her lived experience in and to the world.

The participants in this study reported that they were all pleased about their decision to write a memoir, and found that they greatly benefited from the experience. Writing about the transcendent experience offered another way of knowing and understanding their lived experience and provided another path leading them to transformation and empowerment.

In addition to achieving personal transformation and empowerment, memoir writing and sharing stories is also an endeavor for the collective and a way to assist in cultural education to initiate change. The writing and reading of
memoirs encourages self-reflection and acceptance of the self and others. Sharing stories through the process of memoir writing helps foster a sense of interconnectedness, and breaks down barriers that might have divided cultures in the past. Human stories bring us together, which fosters and encourages compassion and understanding of one another as individuals and as a culture.

**Researcher Reflections**

Much of the joy in doing the work for this study originated from my own personal interest in memoir writing. My passion for the subject emanated during my interviews, as an immediate connection was established with the participants. The sense of interconnectedness was apparent during all my interactions with the participants; I believe this was comforting for the participants and eased the potential strains on a researcher–participant relationship.

I realized that research can be transformative for both the researcher and the participant. Anderson and Braud (2011) mentioned that implicit in the transformative vision is the idea that research can be transformative on many levels, including individual, communal, and global. On an individual level, the participants were encouraged to reflect on their writing process and identify transformative elements that occurred during the writing process and our discussions. As a researcher, I was transformed by the cooperation and enthusiasm of the chosen participants, and also by some of the salient data that emerged from this study. On a communal level, interesting material emerged during the discussion between the participants and researcher regarding the process of memoir writing, which in turn encouraged the participants to think about how to communicate and teach the transformative properties of writing with their students. From a global standpoint, changes and transformation occur as a result of the ripple effect—first individual, then communal, and then global.

The use of qualitative method of narrative inquiry was a good fit for the subject being examined. This method allowed the most transparency of storytelling, but at the same time provided an open forum for the participants to share their stories. I realized this method of inquiry was consistent with my own passion for storytelling and memoir writing as a way to impact readers, by offering the possibility of transforming readers rather than attempting to prove anything in particular.

In reflecting on the process of memoir writing throughout this study, another factor repeatedly struck me: how long it took each memoirist to complete the memoir and the sense of flow during the process. The more I understood the process described by my participants, the more my focus shifted toward the positive pull they were experiencing as memoir increased their sense of wholeness, rather than repairing a wound. I believe the words *transformation* and *empowerment* are more positive, and lend themselves to deeper discussion of self-actualization and metamotivation.
Transformation and empowerment seemed to occur as a result of a lapse of time between the transcendent experience and the memoir writing. This time lapse seemed to allow enough time for reflection and contemplation. This distance from the transcendent experience and the self-understanding and reflection that came from writing the memoir is what led to transformation and a sense of empowerment. The participants were offered the time to reflect and identify the significance of the transcendent experience in their life, and how it affected their life theme. It was evident from the results of my study that individuals may be unaware of the impact of a transcendent experience at the time of its occurrence; only distance from it can help the person identify its impact. For example, the ramifications of finding my grandmother dead in her bed did not become apparent until 40 years after the event. Although the suicide was not connected to my cancer diagnosis, when diagnosed with cancer I wondered if that was why my grandmother committed suicide so I began studying her life; however, it was not apparent that she committed suicide because of a cancer diagnosis. Nevertheless, the investigation led to my reflection and analysis of the effect of her suicide on my life. As a practical matter, this suggests that those of us feeling called to write memoirs may allow ourselves time to let the stories emerge as part of our lived process.

**Overall Findings**

The primary goal of this study was to identify the healing, transformative, and empowering dynamics of an esteemed writer writing a full-length memoir inspired by a pivotal or transcendent experience. The study and interviews were sparked by the main research question: What are the transformative dynamics of writing a memoir elicited by a pivotal or transcendent experience? The subquestions were (a) What are the pivotal or transcendent experiences that inspire memoir writing for transformation and empowerment in esteemed writers? (b) What is the impact of the pivotal or transcendent experiences in terms of an individual’s life theme? (c) How are those experiences representative of Maslow's theory of metamotivation, B- (being) creativity and D- (deficiency) creativity? The theoretical framework used was narrative research that served to create a sense of meaning and significance to the transcendent experiences. The philosophical assumptions used in this study were transpersonal and constructionist, a large universal theme that included observations, interviews, and socially constructed conclusions. The other important element of information was the idea that restorying or retelling stories can be transformative and empowering.

The data revealed that creative expression, such as memoir writing, when used as a transpersonal practice, encourages self-reflection, increased awareness, insight, discernment, compassion, and mindfulness when using writing techniques such as embodied writing and reflexivity. For the participants, these practices all led to a deeper understanding of the meaning of the transcendent experience and the role it played in their lives. Also, the restorying of a lived experience helped cast light on issues that might not have been illuminated had the participants not decided to write a memoir.
The findings suggest that the participants were both transformed and empowered by the experience and process of writing a full-length memoir. In some cases, the writers began writing with one mission or reason in mind. During the writing process, however, they found that the memoir took a different path, leading the focus or reason for writing in a different direction. As a result, the memoirists connected with deeper reflections or illuminations about the experience and its role in the larger context of their lives, individually and in the universal perspective. This change in direction during the writing process also illustrates the role of creative flow in memoir writing. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) stated that the desire for answers is the drive that aids in the creative flow. Furthermore, in working with flow, there is a greater tendency for the writer to choose the path inherent to his or her life theme that could lead to the development of his or her full human potential and self-actualization as a way to navigate from D- (deficiency) creativity to B- (being) creativity. This confluence all leads to psychological well-being and harmony, which results in transformation and a sense of empowerment.

Writing about their lived experiences was a way for the participants to bring meaning into their lives, as well as make sense of the pivotal or transcendent experiences connected to loss. Furthermore, writing a memoir provided the opportunity for these memoirists to review their lives in the context of the lived transcendent experience restorying it from their present-day perspective. This experience and process resulted in feelings of resolution, and the ability to comfortably move forward into the next phase of life and/or onto other projects. A sense of inner peace was identified, which in and of itself was transformative and empowering.

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The Author

Diana Raab, Ph.D., is a transpersonal psychologist, poet, memoirist, workshop leader, speaker, and award-winning author of eight books, including two memoirs and four poetry books, in addition to 500 articles and published poems. Her passion and expertise is writing for healing, transformation, and empowerment. She has been writing since the age of 10 when she received from her mother her first her journal to cope with her grandmother and caretaker’s suicide. She is a regular blogger for Psychology Today, The Huffington Post (Huff50), and BrainSpeak. Raab serves on a number of boards including The Center for Autobiographical Studies, Poets & Writers, WriteGirl, Antioch University’s Santa Barbara’s Advisory Board to the MFA in Writing Program, and she is a trustee for the University of Santa Barbara (UCSB). She lives in Southern California.
IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE PROPHETS?
A TWO-STEP REVELATION FROM THE BLACK LIGHT
TO THE GREEN ANGEL
(WITH TRANSPERSONAL AND PARTICIPATORY
COMMENTARY)

G. A. Lahood, Ph.D.
Byron Bay, NSW: Australia

ABSTRACT: The article examines a Prophetic Vision/Mystical Illumination (after Michael Washburn), a meeting with Al’ Khidr—the Angel Holy Spirit—(after Henry Corbin), and a Luminous Night Journey (after Muhammad and Sufism) and locates the event in the theistic Abrahamic or Prophetic Tradition. The Prophetic encounter with the Angel Holy Spirit discloses a relational cosmos calling for more relational practices. Spiritual narcissism is discussed in the light of the Theophanic Other and the relational function of the Eternal Thou. Relational spirituality is depicted as a dynamic interpersonal path of beauty, which, because of its open-ended nature, can be compared metaphorically to an Ocean without Shore.

KEYWORDS: Angels, theophany, Prophetic Tradition, spiritual-narcissism, revelation, Sufism, transpersonal psychology, relational-spirituality.

For, if it is true that God wants to be eternally (that is to say now) known by a Witness (shahid), this witness can be no other than himself … This witness must realize that if he is the Witness of God, it is because he is himself the mirror, the eye through which God contemplates himself.

The Jasmine of the Fidele d’Amore (Henry Corbin, 1990, p. 207)

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN ANGEL

Recently, it has been acknowledged by scholars in the field of transpersonal and participatory philosophy that it is important to reveal one’s own experience when writing about matters transpersonal (e.g., Heron, 1998; Wilber, 2001). And, since transpersonal philosophy cannot be done at a distance (Wilber, 2001), it would appear that participation and representation (autobiography) must be central to the construction of transpersonal knowledge. Stanislav Grof in The Cosmic Game (1998) included some of his own non-ordinary adventures into realms “beyond consensus reality” (1988, p. 43). Christopher Bache’s autobiographical account serves as the bedrock of his research into a sacred mind (2000). Perhaps not strictly in the transpersonal camp, A. H. Almaas’ Luminous Night Journey: An autobiographical fragment (2000) is somewhat self-explanatory; and John Heron, with regard to Michael
Washburn’s *Ego and the Dynamic Ground* (1995) is critical of a lack of ownership in the text:

…it is not at all clear how this theory is experientially based. There is a sustained and cogent account of what is going on at the different stages, [which included in the final regeneration of spirit phase “prophetic vision”] but no account of whom, if anyone, it is all going on for (my bracket). (1998, p. 75)

In other words, whose ego was regressing to the *dynamic ground in service of transcendence* and who then is suffering ego-death, and who is being graced and transfigured by prophetic visions and mystical illumination?

So with this encouragement from such distinguished transpersonal theorists, anthropologists and philosophers, and with a vague Biblical echo somewhere gently exhorting me not to hide my available light ‘under a bushel’ (not that I am a traditional theist by any means), I want to ‘come out’ as a recipient of something like Washburn’s “prophetic vision” (1995, p. 245). More importantly, and perhaps in keeping with prophetic tradition, I come out—as an initiand and (therefore) a disciple of a Theophanic Angel—an Angel that makes its home mostly, but as we shall see, apparently not exclusively, in the Islamic and pre-Islamic Persian *weltanschauung.*

**Personal Context**

The event occurred in New Zealand, and I was, at the time, naïve when it came to Judaism, Islam, or Gnosticism. I came from a secular and nominally Christian background. My mother was a non-practicing Protestant (an ancestor had been a pioneering Methodist missionary who had preached in Maori). My father was a non-practicing Catholic New Zealander, whose father immigrated (first to America) from Mount Lebanon (and the village of celebrated poet and author of ‘The Prophet’ Kahlil Gibran). My father’s people were Maronite Christians, an ethno-religious group originating from North Syria who spoke a dialect of Syriac Aramaic. My father did not pursue his heritage and was largely uneducated. I was born in 1960 and was certainly affected by the new spirituality of the times, anti-Viet Nam, pro-hippie and like many of my generation following the Beatles toward the East. By the time I was 20 every second book I read was on Zen Buddhism, and by 23 I had written to the late Abbott John Toller in Nara (Japan) seeking refuge there as a Buddhist monk. My life took a different turn into psychodrama, psychotherapy, exposure to Grof’s breathwork, dietary restriction, and a sincere invitation to a ‘greater power’ to govern my life. While I carried a desire for ‘higher consciousness’ or enlightenment the last thing I would have expected or courted was a meeting with an Angel. At that time, for me, Angels belonged to a bygone age of Christian superstition (at which I had rebelled), trite figures on Christmas cards, or to a certain stream of New Age enthusiasm and self-deception.
In terms of the Angel-Theophany there was no overt cultural pre-conditioning pattern to mediate the experience, and yet, contrary to the contextualist position (e.g., Katz, 1978), it seems to me now to be a highly culture-specific event. For seven years or so, beginning in my late teens and early 20s, I participated in a series of rather dramatic psychic and mystical openings that culminated in the encounter with a being of light in a luminous dimension seemingly not of this world. I have come to believe this realm is what Sufi mystics call the *alam al mithal*: an intermediate dimension, a living world of light, luminosity and cosmic love. During these years, at certain peak moments, intimations of this world would open up, and I would find myself participating with a benign, intimate, and sensuous Presence.

With hindsight I can see that each of these openings was somehow an attribute of the same event ... there was an intelligent telos to the whole process. The overall trajectory of the event matches pretty well with Washburn’s developmental model; there was a regressive u-turn in service of spirit and a process of spiritual regeneration, except that, contra Washburn (1995, p. 21), it did not start in midlife, but in my early 20s, and there were some events in earlier childhood. The overall pattern included opening to immanent spirit, de-repressing various transpersonal potentials, but also the recollection of participatory feeling (after Heron, 1992), and the opening of subtle organs or *latifah*, and its basic structure was di-polar in that it opened to and retrieved both immanent and transcendental potentials in ascending and descending patterns of revelation (cf. Daniels, 2005; cf. Heron, 1998).

For many years I kept this charism mostly to myself as a matter of prudence and modesty, and because I did not really understand what it was, other than a deeply personal, deeply fascinating, holy, and an astonishingly liberating event. I had supposed it was an encounter with a Christ-like figure or personified archetype because of some of the symbolism e.g., a long-haired, bearded man in a Garden of Light coupled with the extreme quality of Love, cosmic comprehension and numinous redemption it carried.

Soon after the event I began absorbing transpersonal psychology (in particular Wilber and Grof, and which included ‘Transpersonal Training’ with the latter in San Francisco). Wilber’s authority and centrality at the time, asked me to imagine the visionary moment as something to be discarded on the way to a more recognizable Hindu/Buddhist non-dual enlightenment. As Mike Daniels later observed, with Wilber, theistic religious experiences are “easily dismissed within his scheme as ‘merely’ subtle” (Daniels, 2005, p. 230). So I came to think of the event as something redundant and lower down the ladder on Wilber’s hierarchy and did my best to dismiss it. I was young, 28, emotionally shaken from the events, and I clung to the raft of Wilber and Grof’s worldview because it gave me a positive way to view the event other than psychosis.

However, as I absorbed Washburn’s challenge to Wilber with its more relational developmental model (1995), the penetrating critique of authoritarian religion and the participatory approach offered by John Heron (1992, 1998) (with whom I was fortunate to spend some 10 years in spiritual co-inquiry in
New Zealand), the masterful participatory re-shaping of Grof’s work by Richard Tarnas (1991), and the democratization of spiritual paths and their respective enlightenments by Jorge Ferrer (2002), Wilber’s magisterial account became less compelling for me, and the advent of the Angel-Holy Spirit began to resurrect itself. Around 2002 I discovered the works of Henry Corbin, and the Angel finally found its place (e.g., Corbin 1969, 1990), and, rather than attempting to discard, transcend or otherwise move on from the Angel, I began to feel again our warm embrace.

Henry Corbin was professor of Iranian studies at the Sorbonne, a celebrated commentator on Islamic religion and Persian Sufism. After discovering the work of ‘the Shayk of Light’ Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, Corbin became devoted to Iranian mystical thought, which he saw as a means to spiritual initiation and salvation. Suhrawardi was also known as ‘the murdered Shayk’—he had attempted a revival of hermetic and Zoroastrian gnosis because he saw that “Zoroaster, the prophet of ancient Persia, belonged to a hierohistory of the people of the Book” (Avens, 1988b, p. 4). It was because of this assertion that he met a martyr’s end. Zoroaster, perhaps the first prophet, also claimed he had spoken to God “face to face” (Zaehner, 1961, p. 92).

So now, after 25 years of developmental seasoning (with hopefully some integration), ongoing research, and the gift of reflection, I have decided to ‘come out’ as a disciple of Elijah/Khidr, that which the scholar and mystic Louis Massignon translated as ‘The Verdant One,’ The Green Angel (as everything associated with nature and water) (Corbin, 1969, p. 56). I believe I encountered Elijah/Khidr or, in Henry Corbin’s language, the Angel “Holy Spirit” (1969, p. 54), and I want to co-create a place for that encounter within the discipline of contemporary transpersonal psychology. The following, then, is an ‘autobiographical fragment’ (to borrow from Almaas) of my participation in the Luminous Night, meeting the Prophet of my Being, and investiture by the Angel Holy Spirit. However, I do not profess to be anything like a Sufi, Shayk, Nabi nor any kind of Prophet. This is partly because the Angelic revelation or Elastic function transcends Islam (as it does Christianity and Judaism), partly because I have had no contact with the culture of Sufi Orders, and partly because I do not wish to be charged with being a pseudo-Sufi (e.g., Nasr, 2007, p. 111) much less a false Prophet.

Furthermore, I do not think of myself as a scholar or theologian of Islam, Christianity or Judaism; my interest has been in the science and culture of transpersonal psychology (Lahood, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2013). Nevertheless, I hope the event and my attempt at a retrospective transpersonal anthropology (in the realm of spirit) will have some value for transpersonal psychology and the study of mysticism, religion and participatory spirituality in general.

I am involved with a small group of persons who are interested in co-creating the modes of being and presence that are requisite conditions for an Angelic relationship to emerge, which is to say I am involved in a long-term co-relational-inquiry (see Heron & Lahood 2008, Lahood, 2010b, Lahood, 2013)
into the Angel’s ‘Shore’ (to adopt Ferrer’s metaphor). This inquiry has been underway for some years now, and I believe the Angel’s embrace guides our inquiry into non-authoritarian spiritual life or, in other words, relational spirituality (see Lahood, 2010a, 2010b, 2013).

**Writing the Unspeakable**

Speaking of Angels requires a language that is both poetic (Hillman, 1992) and enthusiastic (from the Greek word ‘entheos’—to be possessed by a deity). The enthused language I have used (below) is the same with which I would impart the vision to a friend. I have done my best to capture a heart, my heart, on fire with mystical love—and have likely failed. If my speech seems a bit self-aggrandizing, too inflated, intoxicated or inebriated, let us look, for a moment, at the language of another figure in the Abrahamic Tradition who may have drunk from a similar well (or rafted to a resonant spiritual shore) and has become likewise besotted.

Baha’u’llah, the founder of the Baha’i Faith, while he was in the dungeon of the *Siyah-Chal* (called the Black Pit of Persia) in 1852–53, had a vision of what he called the ‘Maid of Heaven,’ and it was this vision that sealed his mission:

> While engulfed in tribulations, I heard a most wondrous, a most sweet voice, calling above my head. Turning my face, I beheld a Maiden—the embodiment of the remembrance of the name of my Lord—suspended in the air before me. So rejoiced was she in her very soul that her countenance shone with the ornament of the good-pleasure of God, and her cheeks glowed with the brightness of the all-Merciful. Betwixt earth and heaven she was raising a call, which captivated the hearts and minds of men. She was imparting to both my inward and outward being tidings, which rejoiced my soul, and the souls of God’s honored servants. Pointing with her finger unto my head, she addressed all who are in heaven and all who are on earth, saying: ‘By God! This is the Best-Beloved of the worlds, and yet ye comprehend not. This is the Beauty of God amongst you, and the power of His sovereignty within you, could ye but understand. This is the Mystery of God and His treasure, the Cause of God and His Glory unto all who are in the kingdoms of Revelation and of creation, if ye be of them that perceive. (Ullman & Reichenberg-Ullman, 2001, p. 88)

Imprisoned and in extreme circumstance something profound occurred to *Mirza Husayn-Ali Nuri* (Baha’u’llah) and he suffered glorification.

What was going on for me at the time? I was deeply bereft; I had lost a strained relationship to a beloved partner and our infant child several years before, and somewhere I was inconsolable. Beneath this loss, was a whole system of loss and abandonment, consistent with what Grof has usefully described as a COEX system (1985), and underneath this, I believe, was the agony of what Washburn has called ‘primal repression’ (1995), the separation (or in keeping with Sufi tradition, ‘exile’) from cosmic source...my yearning for peace,
salvation, or union with God was immense and at times misguided and misplaced in its efforts to find communion. The more loss suffered, the more I yearned for salvation and peace. I found myself in a veritable desert of desolation, acute self-consciousness, debilitating shame and loneliness beyond measure. It is true to say that during these years I spent a fair amount of time on my knees, and I recall very well the Hour of Terror when I realized the way in which I was co-creating my world was self-destructive, and so I became quite still.

I am still weighing in with how much I want to say publically about my personal circumstances because, such events, as Grof has amply shown, are closely woven into biographical trauma (1985). The event was not dissociated from the human world of social relations or the intersubjective worldspace in its catalyzation, although it may appear to be in this fragment. I believe it came as a healing charisma or Grace in an attempt to restore right relations and a felt sense of kinship with the cosmos. It was a condensed experience of cosmic separation and reunion implicating primal repression (Washburn, 1995), perinatal structuring (Grof, 1985, Tarnas, 1991), socialization and language acquisition—the fall from participatory feeling (Heron, 1992) and original wounding as in Sufi cosmology:

To come into being at all as creatures distinct from the Creator, we must exist at some remove from the source of our being. Otherwise we would have no independent being whatever, and there would be no creatures, no Creation. Our eternal individualities would be impossible. For us to be at all there must be an original separation, a fall or a rupture giving birth to our independence as persons. It is this original otherness that makes possible both our independent being and our perpetual longing. It is the necessary curtain separating God from his creatures and it gives rise to what the Sufis call the Test of the Veil. (Cheetham, 2007, p. 7)

I was certainly at a transpersonal impasse—the only way through for me was to reach out to something having been selectively blinded to hope and trust and pray that in doing so I would reach a new land where I might feel safe, released and whole. This was another moment of egocentric terror, and I had no idea that something might reach back - yet it did. Abraham Joshua Heschel, a Jewish theologian, claims there is a play between theo-tropism, the human yearning and reaching for God, and reciprocal action anthropo-tropism of God reaching and yearning for contact with humans (1962). “Each time the heart sighs for the Throne, the Throne sighs for the heart, and so they meet … each time a flame rises from you, a corresponding flame comes down toward you” (Corbin, 1994, p. 73).

**Luminous Night Journey**

The rapture began with a build-up of tension and pain in my body. I felt sick with fear and wanted to vomit. I could not help myself, and my body began to writhe in agony. Into my awareness storms a terrifying, violent and shattering encounter with my father. Now, with eyes closed, it was as if my mind’s eye opened wide, and
I beheld a green light spiraling out of my heart and flying into the Sun. The emerald light poured into the Sun, and, as if it were being impregnated, it seemed to swell and grow. At the same time the universe began to beat like a mighty drum, a great heartbeat accompanied by a silent chant that seemed to roar “death”! And I felt a deep unstoppable roar answering the chant from within and something like a fire inside of myself as the Holy Flame awakened from its long slumber and consumed me as if in an eternal fire of cleansing flames.

First, it was as if my mind became filled with translucent and luminous light, but then I was engulfed in a three dimensional vision of brilliance — a great force burst out of the Sun; a mask of Death leapt out the flames to destroy ‘my father’. I/he/it had a snake in one hand and a drum in the other, and all of me was laid waste by its dance of death and destruction. The awful being trampled ‘my father/myself’ into dust and oblivion again and again and again over eons, until I was all trod out, all trampled underfoot, eons of dust — all gone, quiet, quite dead, and I felt at once a great liberation and vast emptiness.

Then I became slowly aware as if slowly waking up from some deep sleep, after the dust had settled, it was as if I had lost all consciousness, as if my consciousness had been absorbed into something else. Then, I was dimly aware of a great fullness and peace wherein there was no hint of time or space only an Eternity of Black Light, so vast and deep, so silent and pregnant as to defy all description. All weight, all lightness, all Bright Luminous Darkness. I am nothing but a breath blowing across the empty face of an endless Ocean of Night — benign, potent and utterly unfathomable.

And ‘I’ was nothing, but nothing yet potentially everything in a Void of Voids, an unending and ever-hidden Ocean. And then, as if from far above, a light of such exquisite lightness and gentleness descending upon those still, dark waters and I – a quivering music – a sweet and luminous note never struck on any earthly instrument – was taken up in a rainbow of light and sound that filled all of heaven. I was drawn slowly and gently up the rainbow in the Green Light as a musical note of such pristine delicacy, yet of such resolute love, and as I rose in the air I was, knew I was, Risen … and as I climbed or was drawn higher and nearer, I became as if insane, swooning in ecstatic remembrance.

The heart of hearts was opening upon an inner ocean of joy, gratitude, praise, and peace, beyond any feeling I thought possible to know - it seemed beyond human. A luminous, shimmering body of Light, and then, I was in the Garden of Paradise and my most Beautiful Lord was before me lying against an eternal rock looking at me with a Face of such Beauty as to shatter the mind—my poor keyboard explodes.

And he came toward me my Heavenly Twin, My Heavenly Father, my Beloved, and as we embraced, I was released from every cage, of every past and every future. I saw that we were robed in the same raiment—I wore his clothing and he mine—a radiant white shirt, purple jeans and leather sandals (this seemed to be oddly important). What happened next is unspeakable.
We lay together, against our rocks, in the Garden of Light in such sublime ecstasy, and the heavenly being gestured towards my genitals. This transmutitive motion somehow releasing my mind from sin and error, our nearness lending understanding of the mystery of sexuality and its nearness to God. All was transmitted in a silent musical language, and every gesture, image and symbol spoke to me of the nature of God…the nearness of God, the glory of God. Laughter from this being carried knowledge greater than our universe. The Perfume of the Garden was like the gentle hint of a deeper unbearably sweet secret fragrance of the heart; I am overwhelmed by the Perfume, and as the smallest of flowers in the Garden of Light unfolded their translucent petals—worlds—whole universes came into being in unrestrained splendor, brilliance, magnificence and Glory.

Everything in that world was transmitting the nature of cosmic love and the secret knowledge of eternity. I understood as I looked upon the Face of the Most Beautiful Form that I was in the presence of the infinite divine; the abundance of creation; the inexhaustible source; the great peace and sufficiency; a feeling of fullness and utter completeness—I was looking at my eternal immortal beloved self, and I somehow understood all of this, as if it was an event agreed upon before time, before ‘coming into being’ an ancient covenant to become the ‘word made flesh’ in the valley of time and mortality. In this I felt cosmically complete, an absolute plenitude, and returned after a long exile of forgetting. And yet, there seemed to be something ‘behind’ or beyond the being, a hieroglyphic, geometric language. So while this reunion of the Soul with its Soul was a gestalt utterly complete in itself—a cosmic endpoint in which I understood it to be a boundary—as if it was the far limit of what was to be known, there was some wholly unknowable Ground from which this figure had emerged as if in a kind of gestalt cosmology.

Not only did I encounter this radiant being of unspeakable love with his overflowing, abundance and creation, his plenitude of cosmic honey, his beatifications, and cosmic benedictions, but also in the process I became so utterly transfigured that I became his twin. A perfect image in his likeness and lights co-enveloped in such a mystery that we appeared to be co-creating or rather multiplying each other. The being then took me to a special place, the centre of the Garden and revealed a cup, and we then sipped from it (our lips touching—this was important) … igniting the sweetest, most delicate illumination of immortality, a wondrous wine; a living water; a nectar that promoted an ecstasy so sublime, so utterly unbridled and free, yet so astonishingly gentle as to be quite beyond the powers of my poor, dazed and be-dazzled keyboard.

As the chambers of the mystic heart opened wide, so did the prophetic visions … then came the very secrets of the universe — the greatest of these was the secret divine’s greatest secret. And therein, I was given a sacred mission to bring all persons to their own Angel or Perfect Nature. I was shown the exact nature of our earthly suffering to come and how we would participate in this and shown the futures—all of which was transmitted in the light of our
heavenly laughter (much of this I cannot recall—it has receded like a tide back to the ground, leaving me in a pleasantly august swoon when I recollect it).

After drinking from that most blessed cup, kissing the lips of the luminous being, and tasting of the incomprehensible mightiness of cosmic love, we walked to the edge of Paradise. Standing high above the world in the pre-eternal infinite and looked down upon the Beloved earth-world and the lustrous Angel of the Holy Spirit; my celestial Self in Heaven turned to me—“here is death, you may stay here in eternal delight and glory or you may go.” And I felt “yes we are in death.”

I felt as if I was in a recapitulation of a decision made eons ago. I knew that I was always here, always in heaven, that in one sense I had never left that high abode and another me would walk the earth and departing that Absolute, Bliss-Filled Paradise I ‘fell’ (or rather dove) into being as this world and all its particulars. This was not a dive into the ‘vale of tears’ or some misbegotten world of illusion but a joyful and lusty embrace of time and space, those powers that enable something of God to come into being; into sacred form—The Ocean of Being poured into the drops.

The most ineffable or indescribable aspect of the Holy Vision, the most impossible aspect to communicate with any sense of having imparted anything even remotely resembling the event itself, was that of ’coming into being’ as the world…as all creation. It was as if a waterfall of translucent pure knowledge cascaded into the many forms—each one the Face of God. The world of Light transmuted into the world matter, the world of matter made Light. Attar wrote that Muhammad, in the Ascension, saw

_The Face of Him who made the Universe_  
_Saw not himself—he saw the Soul of Souls_ (Armstrong, 1993, p. 140)

That last page of this visionary book was that of a Holy Bird (feathers of purple and white) swooping down and across the ocean, effortlessly flying, and in the midst of it all I heard a mighty song like a “hallelujah” lifted up by what seemed to be the Voice of the whole world of nature—rather the whole universe—broken into the song of all songs; “I and my Father are One, and forever reunited.”

And yet, there was still, in that most complete and utter union and Oneness, the signs of sacred distinction and divine differentiation. Having attempted to speak of the unspeakable, I will now attempt to further locate this event in the Prophetic Tradition as envisioned by Henry Corbin.

**The Prophetic Tradition**

In his later years, the author of _Love’s Body_ (1966), Norman O. Brown, turned his attention from the study of psychoanalysis, existentialism and Eros to the study of Islam (1982). Brown was convinced, following the Copernican
Revolution instigated by the scholar of Islam, Marshall Hodgson (1974), that the religion of Muhammad, rather than a theological poor-cousin, was potentially the repository of a truer and more metaphysically compelling form of Christianity (1982). Brown located Islam in the Prophetic Tradition or Abrahamic lineage (an open-ended process in which he also placed the poet William Blake) and saw it as a proper reaction and safeguard against the religious and cultural hybridization that became the Christo/Papal/Roman Empire:

It is time to discard the time-honored prejudice that treats Koranic theology as a confused echo of half-understood Jewish or Christian traditions, selected and polemically distorted to concoct a new-fangled monotheism to supply ‘backward’ Arabs with a ‘cultural identity.’ (Brown, 1982, p. 369)

Refugees from the destruction of Jerusalem, the remnants of Gnostic Christianity, Jewish-Christian Ebionite’s, and Jewish Samaritans, along with Nestorians, Monophysites and Jacobites “took refuge in the desert from the triumph of Caesaropapism” (p. 370) along with another refugee—the Greek philosophical tradition. Here, living cheek by jowl, these groups cross-fertilized with Bedouin resistance to the Holy Roman Empire, and, in the Trans-Jordanian matrix, what was born of 600 years of cultural ferment was Muhammad’s Islam (Brown, 1982). The Prophet’s authority was sealed by his recital of the Holy Koran and his Luminous Night Journey in which he ascended beyond the ‘Lotus of the Limit’, the boundary of human knowledge, and met with his Lord (Armstrong, 1992, p. 104).

Accordingly, writes Brown, Islam retains the Prophet-as-messenger tradition of its Jewish and Christian forebears and neighbors but absolutely rejects the notion that God had materialized on earth in the form of Jesus Christ.

Islam discards the notion of an Incarnate Son of God and, Ebionite fashion, clings to prophecy as the essential mode of miraculous conjunction between the lahut and the nasut, the divine nature and the human or created condition. “The Prophet possessed eminently both the human (nasut) and the spiritual (lahut) natures. Yet, there was never an incarnation of the lahut into the nasut, a perspective which Islam does not accept. (Brown, 1982, p. 374)

There is nevertheless a mysterious bond between the two. According to religious philosopher, Roberts Avens, the nasut (human) is the lahut’s (divinity’s) greatest secret (1988a, p. 75). What then is the nature of the anthropos (cosmic person) within this tradition—what the proper human-divine relationship? This question directs us to contemplate a mysterious figure—the phenomenon named as Khidr—functionalized in the theological works of the French Islamic scholar and Persian Angelologist Henry Corbin (1969, p. 1994), Roberts Avens (1984) and more recently Tom Cheetham (2003, 2005)—as the necessary Angel.

Brown (1992) described Corbin’s place as an important historical interface between Islam and the West. In Brown’s analysis of Corbin, “the central
questions for the Prophetic tradition” (after Moses, Jesus and Muhammad) are: “Who is Khidr?” and “What does it mean to be a disciple of Khidr?” “These questions are the legacy of Islam for the Western, post-Christian world,” wrote Cheetham (2003, p. 104). This question was taken up by one of the important forefathers of transpersonal psychology, Carl Jung, who claimed the figure of this paper’s interest, the Angel Holy Spirit or the Hidden Imam, may well have existed outside of Islam, pre-dating the religion of Muhammad—thus making it a transpersonal artifact central to the theistic/prophetic tradition of the Middle East. Jung wrote:

There, [in the ‘Orient’] the parallel figure is Khadir or El-Khadir, the ‘eternally youthful Chidher’...The legend is purely Islamic. The strange thing is, that Khidr is not only regarded as a saint, but in Sufic circles even has the status of a deity. In view of the strict monotheism of Islam, one is inclined to think of him as a pre-Islamic, Arabian deity who, though not officially recognized by the new religion was, was tolerated for reasons of expediency. (1976, p. 154)

In Symbols of Transformation (1946/1976) Jung included one of his few serious acknowledgements of Islam (in his vast writings on religion, myth and psychology), by recounting the Quranic story of Khidr and Moses (see Ahmad, 1999). Jung claimed that this story was the pith essence of spiritual rebirth. In it, Moses, who represents the law, the outward or conventional religion, is taken on a journey by a strange Prophet—who utterly confounds and confuses him. Acting in ways that are morally incomprehensible to him (e.g., sinking a boat and killing a youth), the enigmatic figure shows Moses something beyond the bounds of literal or dogmatic religion.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, an important scholar of Islamic religion, Sufi mysticism and the perennial philosophy, wrote in The Garden of Truth (2007) that this mysterious prophet is associated with Judaism and Elias [Elijah] and “the Eliatic function of initiation and spiritual guidance” (p. 107). Secondly, Nasr says that the meeting between Moses and Khidr is the prototype of the relationship between a Sufi master and his student. “A Shayk or spiritual master may be appointed by his or her master, or the function may descend from Heaven upon the person” (p. 109). This person will then be called the “Khidr of the spiritual path” (p. 108). Perhaps the greatest of Persian poets, Hafiz exclaimed, “Where is the Khidr of the path?” (p. 108). To these questions I will return: “Who, what, and where is Khidr, and what is it to be his disciple?” But first a brief look at Sufi mysticism.

**Muhammad's Two-Step Revelation**

The prototype for the mystical journey on the Sufi path of love is the ‘Luminous Night Journey’ or ‘Night of the Miraj’—the transfiguration of the Prophet Muhammad, and, as such, it underscores the very foundation of Islam. But according to Martin Lings (1970, p. 34), his other-worldliness has been much overlooked in the West—so I will emphasise it here. During his
Miraculous Night, Muhammad was spirited by the archangel Gabriel through a sequence of heavens, culminating in an ecstatic, ego-annihilating encounter with the Absolute. It is an event that establishes the paradigmatic mystical pathway for Islam: “This religious experience has been immensely important in the evolution of Islamic spirituality... and over the centuries mystics, philosophers and poets have speculated on its significance” (Armstrong, 1992, p. 139).

Muhammad’s Ascension is of particular significance to the Sufis. They felt that his visionary event went beyond the Lotus of the Limit where human knowledge arrives at its farthest reach (Armstrong, 1992). Here occurs \textit{fana fi’llah} (egoic annihilation in God) followed by the most “perilous reabsorption” into God (Cheetham, 2005, p. 73). However, the goal of this evolution, it must be stressed, “is not absorption into the Godhead, but the realization of a concrete and spiritual self-hood [personhood] of a \textit{caro spiritualis} (spiritual body)” (Avens, 1886, p. 9).

Armstrong wrote, “The Quran makes it clear that Muhammad saw only one of the ‘signs’ of God, not God himself, and later mystics emphasized the paradox of this vision, in which Muhammad both saw and did not see the Divine Essence” (1992, p. 139). Thus, in the words of the great Sufi Shayk Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, “For if the messenger had not been called to the Ascension (Miraj) he would not have climbed up to heaven nor would he have come back down, and this journey brought to him the presence of the Angelic Host and the signs of his Lord” (Ibn Arabi, 2009). And some, it would seem, like Ibn Arabi, Ruzbehah, and perhaps myself, can be said to have followed in the footsteps of the Prophets. According to the eminent scholar of Sufism, William Chittick,

Many masters have summed up the path with a saying of an early Sufi that describes Muhammad’s journey: ‘Two strides and he arrived’. With one stride they tell us, he stepped beyond this world, and with the second stride he went beyond the realm of the spirit into the presence of the Real. The two-stride model of realization is most famously represented as “annihilation” (fana) and subsistence (baqa). Both terms derive from the Koranic verse, “Everyone on the face [of the earth] undergoes annihilation, and there subsists the face of thy Lord, Possessor of Majesty and Generous Giving.” (2008, p. 259) \textsuperscript{21}

As noted, Henry Corbin was an important voice in the study of Islamic religion and Persian mysticism, and is notable for revealing a sophisticated angelology at the heart of the Abrahamic tradition (see Cheetham, 2003). In his metaphysics, wrote M. Ali Lakhani, “there exists a higher consciousness than our ordinary consciousness.” Yet this is not a collective one (after Jung) but “one that is intensely personal,”

This higher consciousness is signalled by the Black Light of \textit{fana} (or egoic death), and is associated with the flight into the Darkness of the \textit{Deus Absconditus}, the Hidden Treasure of the celebrated \textit{Hadith} (“I was the Hidden Treasure and yearned to be known, so I created the world in order to be known”). It precedes
the Green Light of baha, of the ultimate theophany [the personal Angel], which is associated with the pleroma of the Deus Revelatus. (Lakhani, 2009, p. 163)

In the event I participated in, first came the experience of fana and a sense of being absorbed into an ocean of bright Black Light; the revelation of the great Ocean of Illumined Darkness that permeates all things was the first step. In Sufism, this is known as mystical poverty or darwish—in this station of extinction we understand the words of the Prophet, “There is no God but God”—everything, our existence and subsistence, like that of the mountain or flower, is given by God. Cheetham wrote:

The luminous night is the night of supraconsciousness that is an “unknowingness which, as such, is knowing.” To attain this luminous night is to have attained the mystical poverty of the “Dervish,” (darwish) or “poor in spirit.” The supreme test for the human soul lies in the confrontation with the Deus Absconditus—to face not the shadow [of evil after Jung], but the Black Face of inaccessible Majesty within which is the Water of Life. (2005, p. 57)

The second step, after absorption by the Luminous Night was the Ascension—as the Green Light travelling upward to the Garden and the Angelic Guide and there to drink of the “The Fountain of Life,” to absorb the “Water of Immortality” (Corbin, 1969, p. 198), at the fons et origio … the Fountain of Youth. This is to realize what the Sufis call mystical poverty:

Either he will be swallowed up by dementia or he will rise again from it, initiated into the meaning of theophanies and revelations … by passing through the annihilation of annihilation …the recognition of the Guide is authenticated, of the “witness in Heaven”…For this recognition implies the recognition of the Unknowable, which is to say metaphysical renunciation and mystical poverty. (Corbin, 1994, p. 117)

In the event in which I participated, someone came back down again while seemingly participating in the original fiat of what appeared to be the Angel of Creation; the Fall into being, manifestation and divine creation. In the transcendent heights I saw a Face:

The Face of Him who made the Universe … the Soul of Souls

Such an encounter, according to this tradition, is characterized by the metamorphosis of a potential person in to a full-blown person (individuation)—at the same time it heralds the evolution of potential angelicity into actual angelicity (Avens, 1988b, p. 8)—it is thus an individuation of the soul, a reunion of the soul with its source—the Angel of Creation.

What I believe began then for me was the path of personhood: a continuing path of narcissistic recognition, letting go (after Evans, 1993) and the vulnerability of becoming more of a person. An idea at the heart of this mystic path of beauty is that by giving birth to the Angel paradoxically gives birth to more of our personhood. However, this is not the person of humanistic psychology
(e.g., Rogers, 1961), not the secular psychological person that has the soul all caged-up in the Cartesian-ego (Hillman, 1992). It is rather the fulfilment and birth of personhood enhanced by contact with a transpersonal Other.

In this form of spiritual realization personhood is not wiped out, as it is in some traditions (e.g., Loy, 1988). Rather personhood (transfigured) is vouchsafed as absolutely central—for it is relationship that is the ground of this cosmology. A more whole person is born with an opportunity (not a guarantee) to fully individuate through a relationship with the Angel Other and with human Others who now stand revealed as Deus Revelatus. This understanding of the Twin Angel finds a parallel in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad and the Bhagavad Gita. The sakshin is the heavenly witness: “two friends with beautiful wings, closely entwined, embracing one and the same tree; one eats the fruits; the other does not eat, but looks on.” The sakshin is the guide; the human being contemplates it and is united with it to the degree that all his defects of character are effaced in it (Corbin, 1994, p. 35–36).

The Path of Love

In Sufi spiritual lore there are a number of ‘stations’ or gradations on the path of love that must be traversed as part of a self-transfiguring journey to God. The number of stations (sometimes valleys) differs according to different Sufi masters. Cheetham writes that within this tradition “there are many descriptions of these Stations and valleys along the way” (2003, p. 53), nevertheless they each refer to the unveiling of a mode of presence which correspond to the mystical Stations of the Sufi – the transformational and self-transfiguring moments that reveal “the hidden things” (p. 52) and that lead the soul to new states of being. It cannot be overestimated that in tradition of the Prophets, “The Stations are modes of being, corresponding to specific virtues, which have their place in an ascending hierarchy leading to the divine” (p. 53).

The Sufi ‘path of love’ was immortalized by the famous Persian poet Farid’ ud-din Attar of Nishapur (who had as his guide a being of light), in his great work The Language of the Birds. In this famous allegory various different kinds of birds (homologous with human souls) must fly over a series of seven mountains and valleys of virtue: seeking, love, self-knowledge, independence, unity, bewilderment, and finally to the Holy Mountain Qaf - the last station or valley of spiritual annihilation and poverty… the knowledge of unknowing and “the utter emptiness of all things” (Chittick, 2008, p. 259). The birds are led by the hoopoe bird that serves as an analogy of a Sufi Shayk (guide/teacher) leading his students to enlightenment, which in Attar’s poem culminates in Oneness with God.

A later Persian mystic, the progenitor of the Baha’i Faith, Baha’u’llah, reworked Attar’s seven mountains into what he called The Seven Valleys (1978) in which the final station revealed a somewhat different spiritual resolution—something more of a bi-unity or sacred dualitude rather than simplistic Oneness with God. As one commentator has noted: “This is the state of annihilation of
self (fana') in God, but not an existential union: the essences of God's self and the mystic's self remain distinct, in contrast to what appears to be a complete union at the end of Attar's book [my emphasis]” (Winters, 1996). This was my experience: there was 'meeting;' there was divine differentiation, intimacy and relationship; there was a cosmic I-Thou; and, as in Plato's demiurge or world soul, it was “capable of relationship” (Sherman 2009, p. 85). There was/is the revelation of sacred distinction found in the writings of the Christian mystic Meister Eckhart:

Eckhart's notion of indistinct union … is fundamentally dialectical, that is to say, union with God is indistinct in the ground, but we always maintain a distinction from God in our formal being … Even in the ultimate union in heaven, Eckhart insists, this distinction will remain. (McGinn, 2001, p. 148)

Corbin refers to 'dualitude'—not the duality in the Christian or Cartesian sense, but a sacred duality, the sacred pairing of the human being and her Theophanic Angel—to create a complete being. Dualitude is, according to Corbin, a bi-unity, in other words, a unity that allows for distinction within that unity. “Although there is an essential unity between the two (lahut and nasut) the creature is distinguished from the Creator” (Corbin, 1969, p. 212). We are, according to Corbin, “an earthly creature with a heavenly counterpart, its archetype or angel” (1957, p. 167). There is then, an imperative within this mystic path to bring into awareness the relationship with our eternal individuality. Latent, in Washburn's dynamic ground, an unfailingly tender Person of Light?

THE ANGELIC FUNCTION AND NEW AGE RELIGION

According to Islamic theology, “God in the abyss of his essence is unknowable—the unpredictable, the incommunicable. The Face that the [Deus Absconditus shows to man, the Deus Revelatus, is necessarily a theophanic figure” (Avens, 1988a, p. 68). Thus, for some Sufis, the guiding image of the Angel is closely bound to their pneuma-psychology and soteriology—the Angel is one half of a bi-unity or di-polarity in which the other half is an earth-bound person. The theophanic Angel, then, is the orientation of that person's mystical evolution, “the goal of which is not absorption into the Godhead” (Avens, 1986, p. 9) but a meeting with the Holy Face.

This is not a movement toward dissolution in the uncreate of popular New Age religion (see Lahood, 2010b)25. It is not a mysticism “that plunges the spiritual into the undifferentiated night of being; it is essentially the meeting of a Face, of an intimate spirit” (Avens, 1988a, p. 69). In the claim made by many Sufis, “Whosoever knows himself knows his Lord” (Lord meaning the Angel or Name—not the quintessential Godhead). In the New Age, we are admonished (albeit lovingly) to disappear into non-dual unity without distinction. This New Age doctrine assumes that the ‘Real’ is only to be found by the spiritual undertaking of stepping back into the uncreate. Here, for example, to Byron Katie a popular New Age teacher orienting her followers,
You notice that everything is continually disappearing, and you celebrate it as it goes back to where it came from: non-existence, the uncreated. And eventually surrender ceases to be necessary. The word implies there is something outside of you to surrender to a monistic subjectivizing. (Katie & Mitchell, 2007, p. 121)

This kind of neo-Vedantic, non-dual mysticism is taken very seriously by many in the New Age. It might be called in Islamic theology “the Tawhid (meaning a certain legitimate way of knowing the unity of God) of the elite” and therefore an “affirmation of the unity of being” (Avens, 1988a, p. 76). Here, “the totality of beings is experienced as vanishing into the sublimity of the unique being. Beings are seen as something purely negative in relation to divine Sovereignty. All existence is immersed in res divina”—in this mysticism our rational consciousness is exchanged for the privilege of “intuitive vision” (p. 76) of unity in the process of ego-death. Wrote Avens, this fana (extinction), this annihilation: “in its banalized form, expressed in the irritating and facile assertion that mystical experience consists of the dissolution of the personality” (p. 76).

Seen from the logic of Corbin’s Angelology the first step into the uncreate is essential, but it should only be a transitory passage. The first spiritual step then is “a return to a state prior to the opposition of subject and object” (the non-dual) where Divine Unity is absolute subjectivity “absolved of every relation other than itself” (Avens, 1988a, p. 74). But this first step is followed by a second sacred step—the “annihilation of annihilation”—which is the rising and resurrection, the coming into being of “all the forms which previously have been immersed in the undifferentiated divine identity” (Avens, 1988a, p. 76), and all our relations are restored at a new level of understanding. It is this all-important second step the New Age nondual orientation misses out on because the orientation toward the Other and the Beauty of the Angel Face is missing.

Let us turn to the testimony of one of the chief exemplars of Persian Sufism, Shayk Ruzbehah of Shiraz. Ruzbehah’s experience is paradigmatic and follows in the cosmic footsteps of his beloved Prophet; he writes, “in the course of my visions … I gradually woke up in the midst of these theophanic forms; my intention was to reach the uncreated, to reach a point when it will be possible to discard theophanisms. Then I saw god [sic] in the most beautiful forms, surging upon me from the world of mystery” (Avens 1988a, 74). His visionary trajectory has much resonance with my experience.

The goal of this two-step orientation therefore is not that of the so-called ‘universal’ nondualism privileged by the early transpersonal movement and set as the goal and zenith of spiritual evolution (e.g., Grof 1985; Wilber 1980). Rather, our goal is a relational, sensuous, and embodied spirituality, a “‘spiritual corporeity’ of Divine Presence rooted in Personhood” (Lakhani, 2009, p. 155), active in the here-now situation. This all goes to the heart of Islam’s esoteric science of love and the very act of creation itself. Shayk Ruzbehah wrote in his spiritual diary The Biography of an Archangel that, “We can love only a personal being, a being with a ‘particular face.’ Of necessity,
then, God, if he is to be loved, must assume the form of the Eternal Companion, the Witness in Heaven” (Avens, 1988a, p. 67). It may be wondered then if God yearns for relationship—and if Creation in its spatializing, individuating forms—is the necessary ground of relationality and love.

The Angel is the guide, the invisible Shayk and guardian reserved for those with no earthly master—“the master of the masterless,” set apart for those “who owe their investiture to no authority” (Corbin, 1969, p. 55). However, this Angel initiator “does not lead all of its disciples in a uniform way to the same goal” (Avens, 1988a, p. 9). Each is led to her own eternal individuality, for ultimately we are each a unique theophany—a Manifestation of God—and (within the Abrahamic Tradition) we discover this when we discover our individual Lord. Thus, it is the ministry of the Angel to “individuate a relationship with each human individual” (p. 15). Avens suggests a parallel here to Buddhism, in that the “Buddha individuates his relationship with each follower of the Middle Path” (p. 15). Human beings have the capacity to become Demonic (unconscious) or fulfill themselves in their Angelicity (transconscious), and, because it is lived in the situational world of relationships in all their complexity, the way of the Angel offers unending possibilities for the refinement of character, and continual restoration of the Good in our earthly relations.

The Angel and Narcissism

The great spiritual traditions warn of the spiritual pitfalls of inflation, hubris, arrogance, conceit or pride. Contemporary transpersonalism, because it draws from these same traditions, also concerns itself with the pitfall of spiritual narcissism (Ferrer, 2002; Lahood 2010b; Wilber, Engler, & Brown, 1986). Tom Cheetham, a contemporary scholar of Corbin’s work, outlines the need for the Angelic orientation in terms of limiting narcissistic modes of being:

Without a Guide, the anguish and abandonment that begins as an intimate and personal despair expands to become public and dogmatic a-gnosticism that descends naturally into nihilism. To be unconscious in this way is to be unbalanced in the absence of the figure the Heavenly Twin, the Angel Holy Spirit who is the Orient of the soul and the foundation of all community. Bereft of any consciousness of this figure I am abandoned. My anguish and despair are mine and I am alone. But because I am plunged into unconsciousness there appears no boundary to my soul and my passions seem to fill the cosmos. ...This extraordinary inflation, the tortured arrogance with which the human soul becomes the measure of all things, is a form of philautia, self-love. The love which is properly turned towards the Angel and towards others through whom the Angel’s beauty shines is turned entirely inward. The energies of the soul are blocked from natural expression and release. (2009, p. 6–7)

Cheetham’s philautia, a term he draws from early Christian mysticism (see Clement, 1993), is a form of spiritual narcissism—due to the lack of orientation
to the Angel Face. Avens summed up the function of the Face in this way: without the cosmic orientation of an Angelology there is no alternative save to sink into a “Luciferian Inflation” and the mystical intoxication expressed by al-Halaj, “I am God” (1986, p. 15). Corbin believed that deciphering the Angelic function was a key to a secret that preserved the spiritual-person not only from “pseudomystical monism,” but also from “abstract monotheism, which is content to superimpose an ens supremum on the multitude of beings” (1971, p. 25).

Corbin’s two spiritual pitfalls (above) may be equated with extreme subjectivism and objectivism, which Evans (1993) sees as two primary contributors to narcissistic modes of being. Thus, our self-enclosure through Corbin’s ‘pseudomystical monism’ is to subjectivize reality, to devour the Other; “subjectivizing the world is like incorporating it all to myself so that I expand to the size of the Cosmos” (Evans, 1993, p. 42). Recall Byron Katie (above) who claimed that “surrender” was unnecessary because, “The word implies there is something outside of you to surrender to” (Katie & Mitchell, 2007, p. 121), absolute subjective monism.

Opposite to this is another source of self-separation: objectivism. This is to set the world at a distance, to detach from feeling it, to look out on people as though a remote observer with a “disembodied intellect.” Here I “master my world with my mind and will” (Evans, 1993, p. 45). I peer out at it with an aloof and objectifying gaze…the I-It of Martin Buber has become a fixed perceptual gestalt. Our language separates subject from object and sets things perceived as apart and separate from my participation. I forget that all perception is participatory: sight, sound, smell, touch, taste, beauty … the figures of a gnostic ground (cf. Heron, 1992).

What Corbin sees as the common Tawhid is “abstract monotheism” and is born out of objectivising God:

Naïve and dogmatic monotheism, satisfied with complete objectivization of the divine: an ens supremum, a transcendent object is superimposed upon the totality of creaturely beings…The objectification of the divine results in the socialization [of religion]: all creaturely beings are assembled on an egalitarian plane and maintained equidistant from the transcendent object. (Avens, 1988a, p. 76)

According to Corbin, this pitfall occurs when we lose the orientation to the Angel’s Face:

When this happens, each man tends to confound his Lord … with the Divine being as such, and to wish to impose Him upon all … having lost his bond with his specific Lord-archetype (that is having lost knowledge of himself), each ego is exposed to a hypertrophy that can easily degenerate into spiritual imperialism; this kind of religion no longer aims to unite each man with his own Lord, but solely to impose the “same Lord” upon all. (1969, p. 210)
The Prophetic Seal

The spiritual imperialism Corbin warns of may also be implicated in religious narcissism. Jorge Ferrer has drawn attention to the problem of “doctrinal ranking,” which is to elevate one’s own spiritual tradition, practice or teacher “as the universally superior one,” a symptom of what he calls spiritual narcissism, which is “pandemic in the human approach to religious diversity” (Ferrer, 2011, p. 18). He has listed various schools, traditions and teachers who engage in this kind of competitive spirituality:

This competitive predicament among religious beliefs is not only a philosophical or existential problem; it has also has profoundly affected how people from different credos engage one another and, even today, plays an important role in many interreligious conflicts, quarrels, and even holy wars. (2009, p. 139)

While Ferrer mostly focuses on the gradations of Hindu and Buddhist traditions, the same dynamic is found living in theistic traditions. I follow Ferrer with a few more examples: “Christianity regarded pagan religions as incomplete steps towards the final Christian revelation. Likewise, in Islam, the teachings of Jesus and the ancient prophets of Israel are recognized as relatively valid but imperfect versions of the final Truth revealed in the Koran” (Ferrer, 2008, p. 146).

Mani, the founder of Manichaeism, a hybrid religion drawn from Persian Zoroastrianism, Syrian Christianity, and Indian Buddhism, claimed a monopoly on spiritual knowing and that his vision was more perfected than the previous religions. “This revelation of mine of the two principles and my living books, my wisdom and knowledge are above and better than those of the previous religions” (Asmussen, 1975, p. 12). Mani the ‘apostle of light’ extended his authority and religious monopoly through soteriological threats of ‘no entry’ when it came time for entering Heaven, using as emotional leverage, the hope and promise of ongoing existence in the hereafter. “To join the Manichaean religion is the best one can do, because Manichaeism is the only door of redemption and XradeSahr [god] will summon all people at the end of time for the last judgment” (Hutter, 1993, p. 3).

Muhammad’s ‘night journey,’ celebrated each year in the seventh lunar month, is of great import to the Sufis. They felt that the Prophet’s apotheosis or “supreme vision” (Armstrong, 1992, p. 139) where he was guided by the archangel Gabriel through heaven marked the very limit of human knowledge. This transpersonal experience, held to be a defining one for Islam, entered the Western literary tradition through Dante’s work The Divine Comedy. However in an act “typical of Western schizophrenia” Dante scandalously placed “the Prophet himself in the lowest circles of hell” (p. 139).

The Prophet Muhammad is seen within Islam as the final messenger—the Seal of the Prophets (Khâtam al-Nabiyyûn). The poet Rumi in his Masnavi wrote:
He has been raised to the station of Khatam (seal) by the grace of God. There can never be his like before him or after. When a master excels all others in his art, don’t you use the word “khatam” to convey the idea that he has excelled all others in his domain? (Rumi, 1917, p. 8)

However, the claim to finality may not sit so well in other Semitic religions: “Because it precludes the acceptance of Messengers of God after the Islamic dispensation, the concept of the Finality of Prophethood (khatm al-nubuwwa) is the major theological barrier between the Baha’i Faith and Islam” (Fazel & Fananapazir, 1993).

Baha’u’llah, founder of the Baha’i Faith claimed that his revelation rendered all the previous prophets and the divine messages they carried incomplete. This led him to rank his revelation specifically over and above the competition—Muhammad and the Sufi masters and lights such as Ibn Arabi, or Jelaluddin Rumi. Baha’u’llah decrees: “Now forget them all, that thou mayest learn from the Master of Love in the schoolhouse of oneness, and return unto God, and forsake the inner land of unreality, for thy true station” (1978, p. 28). The translator then wrote: “This [inner land] refers to the Sufi idea of the inner plane ['alam al-mithal'], which compared to Revealed Truth is but unreal” (p. 28). This is no small claim, for the alam al-mithal is the “realm of Sufi visions, dreams and spiritual contact with teachers, which plays such important functions in spiritual life, providing guidance, spiritual commissions and initiations, and directing disciples to their chosen shaikh” (Lizzio, 2007, p. 9).

There is also competition between monistic religions and theistic ones, for example, David Loy, a contemporary scholar of Asian non-dual religions (Buddhism, Taoism, Vedanta), holds that “the theistic mystical experience might be seen as an ‘incomplete’ nondual one. In it there is still the awareness of consciousness pervading everywhere, but insofar as the experience is an awareness of...it is still tainted with some delusion [my italics]” (1988, p. 295). On the other hand, “Ramanuja regards the monistic state of becoming Brahman as a stage ‘on the way to union with [a personal] God’ and claimed that the ‘entire system of Advaita Vedanta was resting on wrong assumptions’” (Ferrer, 2008, p. 146).

This spiritual one-upmanship does not always occur between traditions but among the various schools of a single tradition. Consider Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, who founded the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in New York in 1966, and who claimed that “‘real life’ meant following the Bhaktivedanta tradition, devotion to Krishna (God). None of the followers of Jnana, Yoga and Karma [there are four major yogas] can know g[G]od [sic], he argued – only the bhakta (devotee). He quotes from the Gita ‘only through the process of bhakti can one understand g[G]od [sic]’” (Morris, 1994, p. 85).

Buddhism and Hinduism also have a history of ranking and counter-ranking: “Buddhism and other Eastern mystical traditions place their own aspired states...
at the highest levels” (Winkelman, 1993, p. 5), and “within Buddhist scriptures the way of the Buddha is always considered superior to Brahma” (Morris, 1994, p. 49), whereas the Vedanta of Shankara claimed its non-dualism as the final and highest order of consciousness. Nagarjuna, the important philosopher and reformer of ‘middle way’ Buddhism, “trenchantly criticized the Upanishad and Vedanta doctrine that Brahman (absolute spirit) was the sole reality in the world. There was no ‘ground’ or creator of the phenomenal world, and no ‘soul’ within the human subject, identical with Brahman” (p. 65). Nagarjuna, along with Buddha, claimed that the famous central tenant of Hinduism ‘tat tvam asi’ (thou art that) was nothing but a pneumatic illusion (p. 65).

Finally, it is important the reader understand that we are not talking about personal narcissistic-wounds but something absorbed or introjected from culture:

Consider, for example, the Dalai Lama’s defence 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. (D’Costa, as cited in Ferrer, 2009, p. 140)

Ferrer then goes on to say,

That the Dalai Lama himself, arguably a paragon of spiritual humility, altruism, and open-mindedness, holds this view strongly suggests, I believe, 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. Ethnocentrism—the culturally inculcated or indoctrinated belief in cultural/religious superiority—very likely contributes to the structuring of this pervasive tendency. (Ferrer, 2009, p. 147)

I have to wonder if the annexation of further Prophetic revelation is also an expression of spiritual ranking and therefore an example of the kind of ethno-narcissism mentioned above. It is understandable that people make overzealous claims after coming Face to Face with God or have a life-changing meeting with a guru. Perhaps even the greatest of spiritual openings can be appropriated by the human ego (cf. Evans, 1993). Or perhaps the sheer power of the opening, for a moment in time, is in fact, the deepest dive into the Ocean for that cultural moment - a transpersonal gestalt of such power, a seeing through the veil with such clarity, that it truly breaks new ground. Nevertheless, such proclamations can also be politically motivated, and it is in their concern with power, “comparative status” (Evans, 1993, p. 1), or cultural superiority that I believe brings them into the realm of a pneuma-pathology.
Into the Ocean of Emancipation

When it is all said and done, wrote psychiatrist (and Buddhist) Mark Epstein, “The spiritual path is ultimately about confronting one’s own inherent narcissism” (1996, p. 33). Donald Evans, a Christian, philosopher and spiritual counsellor, says that the spiritual path has to do with a “transformative process in which we uncover and let go of our narcissism so as to surrender into the mystery out of which everything continually arises” (1993, p. 4). Following Evans, Ferrer claims the “overcoming of self-centeredness” is the common ground of all genuine spiritual paths. When we manage to shed our narcissistic self-centeredness in participation with a “dynamic and indeterminate spiritual power” (2002, p. 133), we may enter an Ocean of Emancipation (2002, p. 145).

Ferrer holds that entry into this Ocean can be accompanied or followed by a variety of spiritual disclosures and a “transconceptual disclosure of reality” (2002, p. 45) and that “different spiritual ultimates can be enacted through intentional or spontaneous creative participation in an indeterminate spiritual power” (p. 151).

Stanislav Grof’s important research has shown that “LSD experiences could sometimes occur in a religious framework other than the experient’s own” (2002, p. 427).

In non-ordinary states of consciousness, visions of various universal symbols can play a significant role in experiences of individuals who previously had no interest in mysticism or were strongly opposed to anything esoteric. These visions tend to convey instant intuitive understandings of the various levels of meanings of these symbols.

As a result of this kind, subjects can develop accurate understanding of various complex esoteric teachings. In some instances, persons unfamiliar with the Kabbalah had experiences described in the Zohar and Sepher Yetzirah and obtained surprising insights into Kabbalistic symbols. Others were able to describe the meaning and functions of intricate mandalas used in the Tibetan Vajrayana and other tantric systems. (1988, p. 139)

While this has some similarity to my experience, unlike Grof’s patients (using LSD under clinical protocols), mine was a spontaneous, reoccurring and concerted series of comprehensive unveilings over a period of roughly 20 years (the meeting with Divine Sophia and the Lote Tree in my late 30s early 40s). Without a religious context, with no guide or understanding, it was as if I had followed in the footsteps of the prophets … to a long awaited rendezvous.

Anthropologist, David Young, in his discussion of “spontaneous visions,” and using as a model Jung’s archetypal psychology, argued that when something devastating happens to a person and her or his “previous attitudes to life break down,” the contents of the “collective unconscious” become activated, and “autonomous complexes” [spirits] are projected externally [basically an anthropomorphized image from the unconscious with which to communicate], “which can lead to psychosis unless these materials can assume a communicable
form such as a vision [e.g., A Twin Angel]” (1994, p. 185). Successful communication or translation canalizes these powers into consciousness, which can then become a source of creative insight and energy (p. 186).

However, this would deny the Otherness of God. Martin Buber, for one, took Jung to task for his *psychologizing* of God: for making “God’s existence contingent upon the unconscious working of the human soul.” Buber understood “the meeting of God to be one of mutual contact—the reciprocal meeting in life between one existence and another” (Brownell, 2012, p. 98). Whereas for Jung, God’s very existence was dependent on the collective psyche—there is no transcendent Other, no Eternal Thou or Angel—only projection drawn from the personal or collective unconscious (Daniels, 2005, p. 222).

Ferrer’s participatory position holds that “once a spiritual shore has been enacted, it becomes potentially accessible—to some degree and in special circumstances—to the entire human species” (Ferrer, 2002, p. 151). They become “like trails cleared in a dense forest” and therefore the “spiritual pathways traveled by others can be more easily crossed” (p. 151). In *Muhammad: A biography of the Prophet* (1992) Armstrong wrote, “The Sufis depicted Muhammad as a hero, blazing a new trail to God in this experience” (p. 139), and this two-step revelation became embedded and enacted in mystical Islam as the Sufi Path of Love. Ferrer’s notion of the prophetic ‘trail’ being more *easily* crossed is tempered by Washburn:

> Mystical illumination is an experience of inconceivable magnitude. When mystical illumination occurs, the aperture of the soul opens all the way and spirit, in the fullness of its radiant glory, graces the ego with the ultimate vision. Mystical illumination then...is inherently the nature of a gift... Irrespective of human will, it is spiritual power itself that elects the times and places at which it will bare itself to the ego. Mystical illumination, therefore, like prophetic vision and saintly compassion, is statistically extremely rare. (1995, p. 247–248)

Here, according to Washburn, human will has little to do with it, and spirit decides the who, where and when of the revelatory occasion. His statement allows *intention* on the part of spirit/God. Cheetham concurs, “The Personal Guide is not chosen by the ego” (2003, p. 106). Furthermore, to use the event I participated in as a form of transpersonal data (e.g., Young & Goulet, 1994), it was a series of disclosures, at first terrifying (in accordance with Washburn, 1995), fulfilling all of the criteria of near-death-experience (in accordance with Ring, 1990) and deepening in charismatic and illuminative power, culminating with “the supreme form of manifestation of Absolute being, in this tradition, which is the presence of the Angel” (Voss, 2007, p. 6)—the Angel’s Shore.

**INVESTITURE**

Within the Prophetic Tradition there is a clause that states that something intrinsically miraculous can happen in the form of Elijah-Khidr or the Elatic
function as *fana fi 'llah*. Taking a step outside of the literal religion there is still the potential for divine election—this is the emic position (of the people). For the function of Elijah-Khidr is to “free us from the servitude of the literal religion” (Corbin, 1969, p. 55). Thus, the elatic function appears to have a mind of its own. Or, after Muhammad, “Light upon Light God guides to His Light whomever He wishes” (the 35th verse of the 24th sura of the Qur’an).

Among the mystics of Islam, the Sufi’s, spiritual power, grace, or *baraka*, is said to be passed down through the Prophet Muhammad through formal chains of affiliation “through initiation and spiritual practice from generation to generation” (Nasr, 2007, p. 107). Thus most Sufi groups trace their lineage back to the Prophet who was said to have been invested by God. “The Prophet invested Ali with a cloak or *kherqa* on initiating him into the esoteric mysteries, imparting to him therewith the heavenly wisdom that transcends all formal learning. In his turn Ali invested his own initiates, and through them the *selselas* or chains of affiliation passed the inner lore of mystical truth to succeeding generations” (Attar, 1983, p. 3).

Nasr is straightforward about this: one becomes a Sufi only through studying with, and being initiated by, a Sufi master (a conditioning/contextual process), and one becomes a Shayk (spiritual master) only by being appointed by one’s master. But Nasr is also clear that there is an exception to this rule: “the function may descend from heaven;” one can be initiated by Khidr—the “absent” or “invisible” guide—the Hidden Imam (2007). However, in either case (heavenly or human) “there is a need for divine investiture” (2007, p. 109). If we follow this tradition, it would appear that I had been, to use Attar’s language, ‘invested’ by the invisible guide, the master of the masterless, which means the mystery was not transmitted through a human Shayk (but a non-human Shayk).

I was invested through direct contact with the Elijah-Khidr and was clothed in “a garment of light” (purple jeans/white shirt, beard, sandals), and the material world was revealed as light, and I was clothed in this world. I was also given to drink a cup of wine, water or light; Nasr wrote:

> The spiritual wine mentioned in the Quran … is at once the fire of Divine Love and the light of illuminative knowledge and gnosis. It is also the invocation of God’s Names. The disciple is the vessel, into which the wine is poured once the vessel is emptied of its pungent liquid of selfish passions. (2007, p. 109)

I can say that in the zenith of the event this was true, but life has taught me that integration takes time and practice. While it has not been my personal destiny (as yet perhaps) to become involved in traditional Sufi or Christian groups, I have been content to use the transpersonal movement as a general affiliation both in its perennial orchestration (Grof, 1985; Wilber, 1980) and participatory-turn (e.g., Ferrer, 2002; Heron, 1998). I have remained, in my own way, a disciple of the Love and Beauty disclosed by the Angel Holy Spirit largely through the practice of co-inquiry and the field of creative psychotherapy.
Henry Corbin asked, “Who is Khidr?” and “What does it mean to be a disciple of Khidr?” (1969, p. 55). In other words, who or what comes after the Prophets? And “pursuing that question” the ‘Great Master’ Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi who is both revered and condemned in Islam, and who above all was a disciple of Khidr, claimed he had “plunged into an Ocean on whose shore the Prophets remained behind standing” (Brown, 1991, p. 93) and entered an Ocean without Shore. I cannot know exactly what he meant in this statement, but according to William Chittick, in his participatory account of Ibn Arabi’s teachings, “The human soul is open-ended, an ocean without shore” (2008, p. 254).

Perhaps the claim to being the end of all revelation is, after Ferrer, a form of doctrinal ranking and a bid for final authority and therefore a form of spiritual ethno-narcissism. Perhaps Ibn Arabi, understanding this, plunged into something like an *Ocean of Emancipation* and thus liberated himself from deep rooted ethno-narcissistic tendencies—is this what it means to leave the Prophets standing on their shore? My face-to-face encounter with The Angel Holy Spirit, rationally speaking, was impossible, a miracle, and my world was turned inside out (see Cheetham, 2003). A wave of Revelation flowing from the Ocean of Infinitude had overwhelmed my finite ego revealing the world as a Face of God (cf. Lings, 1970). The Angel is a person/archetype—invested with the spirit of freedom and liberation continually stepping beyond the control of the fixed.

**A Path of Beauty**

To be a disciple of Khidr in this age, and after many years of reflection I can profess to being something like that, is to be on the lookout for others through whom the Angel shines or to engage with others so that their numinous Beauty can. To plunge continually into the Ocean without Shore (if this be a metaphor for open ended co-created spirituality) with others so engaged can be imaged as *relational spirituality*. “The basic characteristic of this religion of the spirit is that it will be not only revelation of God to man, but also a revelation of man to man” (Avens, 1988a, p. 70) or woman to woman, etc., as the case may be.

Washburn claims that the power of the Ground is inherently “civilized” and that it is by nature “sensitive and other attuned” (1995, p. 242). As regeneration and integration take place in the divinized person, there is an “outreachingness of spirit” from individuated person to person—forming a community—a “mystical body of ego differentiated spirits [persons]” (p. 242) “moved to join in a higher life” with other integrated and individuated persons (Washburn, 1995, p. 246). This future relational religion will concern itself with the ‘Angel of the between,’ and the *Deus Revelatus* (as civilizing cosmic citizens) gathered in mutual-care, respect and responsibility, to co-create an open-ended interpersonal spirituality—to quote the great Persian poet Rumi:

> When that anxious, self-protecting imagination leaves, The real cooperative work begins.35
Beyond our anxious everyday narcissistic strategies, spirituality—living, loving and learning—will become cooperative, relational and participatory. The Vietnamese Buddhist teacher Tich Nhat Hanh claimed the next Buddha would probably not be an individual but a community. Perhaps, in the same way, we could envision the next Footstep in the Prophet lineage to be a collaborative and communal flowering, a deeply embodied co-inquiry into the transcendent and immanent life divine—a co-inquiry into the reality of radical peer relationship between humans-as-theophanies—as manifestations of God, as flowerings of the Deus Absconditus—come into being. And this is my answer to the question posed by Corbin, “Who is Elijah-Khidr and what does it mean to be a disciple?” for surely it is freedom and dignity for all (and the whole book of nature).

In our Angel cosmology the Divine Being is not fragmented but wholly present in each instance, individualized in each theophany, and to meet the Other in mutual Presence is a kind of attention that “is intensely relational” sensuous, embodied, participatory—a response to

the prophetic summons to experience divine love and beauty through seeing the world as a theophany, through seeking the Angel Holy Spirit in our encounters with the Other, and through incarnating love with other persons whom we encounter not merely abstractly, through their personas, but as the iconic face of the Beloved. (Lakhani, 2009, p. 35)

Theophanic reality is based on the realization of our unique personhood transfigured by love and beauty.

For to transcend our “personality” is not to disappear into some undifferentiated, vaguely blissful sea of divinity, but, on the contrary, to fulfil one’s “specific individuality.” Figuratively speaking, it is not the case of a drop of water merging with the ocean and getting lost therein, but rather, that of the ocean entering the drop of water. (Avens, 1984, p. 20)

This ocean entering the drop is reminiscent of Washburn’s notion of the porous ego suffused and rejuvenated with the cosmic ground (1995). How the drops of water then engage, co-inquire and co-create with each other is my interest. What are the ethics of embodied relational divinity? What is the path of beholding the Other as God’s manifest beauty on earth? What happens to the mode of Presence when a group of drops gather to intentionally enact their theophanic and charismatic presence in a collaborative, co-creative science of the heart? What mode of relational Presence is wanting to be born?

Notes

1 A number of reports exist from anthropologists who have experienced encounters with the spirit-worlds of their host cultures. These range from conversion experiences, Nepalese and Malaysian shamanistic healings, powerful dreams, spirits encountered in ritual, psychotropic states, and Tibetan Buddhist meditation among others (see Young & Goulet, 1994 and Lahood, 2007). The information gathered in these spirit worlds has been used as data...
to gain a greater understanding of the culture, cosmology and spiritual realities as such (see Tambiah, 1970). As an anthropologist and psychotherapist with an interest in transpersonal psychology I use the information gathered in the visionary event as the ground from which to write about relational, contributory and participatory spirituality. I have some ambivalence about ‘coming out’ and using my experience as data in case I am misunderstood as evangelizing, self-aggrandizing, or some kind of New Age, neo-colonial cultural appropriation; nevertheless, I do wish to report on and theorize the event.

2 The term ‘disciple’ is used in the same way that Jack Kornfield, for example, might be said to be a disciple of Buddhism. More importantly because it has a bearing on central question asked in the contemporary study of Theophany (meaning: a visible manifestation of God or an appearance of a deity to a human being). What is it to be disciple of the Elijah/Khidr archetype? (Brown, 1982; Cheetham, 2003; Corbin, 1969). This article is an attempt at answering that question.

3 I am grateful to this journal, the reviewers and the editor, for allowing a place for the Angel in the transpersonal record. I would also like to express thanks to Jorge Ferrer, John Heron, Robert Frager (Shayk Ragip al-Jerrahi) and William Chittick for their various insights and criticisms on early versions of this paper. I would also like to acknowledge Henry Corbin and Tom Cheetham for creating a place for the Angel in their respective work.

4 It has been about 25 years since the Angel encounter, but it is still very vivid to my memory. Over these years, I have written it up, painted it, put it to poetry, spoken it, enacted it collaboratively and taken it to one or two therapists. I have used it as a meditative and contemplative backdrop immersing myself in its feeling tones—it has become for me a form of prayer and communion. It lives on now in a relational embodying process. There are certain key images in the narrative that capture the event for me like pages in a luminous picture book—it was extremely visual, colorful and animated.

5 Morphically speaking, the image of the Angel of Death looked very much like the same form or outline of the Shiva Nataraj of the Hindu pantheon. It had arms outstretched, and one foot was raised, and the other was crushing my ego in the shape of a small male human. This was not a moment of the ‘death of God’ a la Nietzsche but something like the ‘God beyond God’ of Meister Eckhart.

6 With the gift of reflection I believe this was much less a personal father but something representing socialized religion.

7 Die before you die – Muhammad

8 When God began to create heaven and earth—the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind [ruach, breath] from God sweeping over the water…Genesis 1:2

9 The passing from the ‘black light,’ from the ‘luminous night,’ to the brilliance of the emerald vision, will be a sign, according to Semnani, of the completed growth of the subtle organism, the “resurrection body” hidden in the visible physical body (Corbin, 1994, p. 12).

10 I saw the Lord in a most beautiful form - Muhammad

Then I saw god in the most of beautiful forms, surging upon me from the world of mystery - Razbehah of Shiraz (cited in Avens, 1988a, p. 74).

On the horizon of eternity the Divine Face riseth out of the darkness, and the meaning of “All on the earth shall pass away, but the Face of thy Lord”…is made manifest - Baha’u’lla (1978, p. 37).

11 There was something of an ‘erotic’ encounter here that defies my ability to language it.

12 Then I was enveloped by the divine Lights until all of me became light and a robe of honour was bestowed upon me. The likes of which I had never seen

(Ibn Arabi Trans Chittick and James, 2002)

When the human soul has completed its cycle of purifications…it enters a world of light and is united with its eternal partner: I go toward my likeness; and my likeness goes toward me; he embraces me and holds me close. As if I had come out of prison

(Corbin, 1994, p. 33)

13 “This two is not a duality, but a dualitude: a unique and a unique multiplied by each other are one” (Avens, 1988a, p. 77). I saw many Faces of beautiful bearded men in the Face of the Angel as if in a holographic image.

14 [Jesus said] “Whosoever drinks from my mouth will become like me; I myself shall become that person, and the hidden things will be revealed…” Gospel of Thomas

15 That ruby wine tasted by the pure in paradise…my being drenched in that wine which we drank in the pre-eternal dawn (Nasr, 2007, p. 109).

16 He climbs up, and lo! Under his feet were an Earth and a Heaven (Hermes in Corbin, 1994)
I was a Hidden Treasure and I wished to be known, and so I created the world.

According to Marshal Hodgson, Khidr was identified with Elijah and had many shrines in the Syrian hills. Given the Quran accords Khidr great antiquity, "it was not incongruous that his shrines dated back to pre-Islamic times and were sometimes shared with Christians" (1974, p. 461).

I will return to this oversight and its impact on transpersonal psychology in another article. Suffice to say here that Jung’s general missing of Islam may have been carried over into transpersonal psychology by three of the seminal and foundational theoreticians Stanislav Grof, Ken Wilber and Michael Washburn—all were strongly influenced by Jung’s writings and all of their early writings on transpersonal psychology are largely devoid of any real substance vis-à-vis Islam.

This statement seems to add weight to Jung’s insight that Khidr pre-dated, and was incorporated by Islam. It cannot be ignored that without the presence of Angels or Theophanies the great religions of the Middle East would not exist. Elijah was said to have ascended bodily to heaven but has descended in secret many times since. Elias was also present with Moses at Jesus’ transfiguration on Mt. Tabor. Moses, Jesus and Abraham were present when Muhammad went on his transfiguring Night Journey; he stopped at the “Further Mosque” (Armstrong, 1992, p. 138) and prayed with them.

I find this statement deeply resonant with my meeting of the Angel. As the Prophet’s famous message goes, “He who knows himself knows his Lord.” In other words he who knows his Lord/Angel knows himself.

Loy wrote “God is God only in relation to me, but when there is no longer a ‘me’ then the spiritual quest is over” (1988p. 291), and presumably relations are over as well.

“Due to the similarities between the archaic dialect in the oldest layer of Sanskrit used in the Hindu Vedas and the archaic dialect used in the Persian Gāthās … only the Hindu Vedas can be said to vie with the Gāthās for antiquity” (Herrmann, 2009, p. 131).

The soul progresses through a series of ecstatic remembrances or recollections closely bound with death and the realm beyond death as a key experiential theme. This progression is oriented says Cheetham as “being towards the other side of death” (2003, p. 52). Cheetham writes, “For this kind of Presence to open up for us requires the discovery, or the recognition, of a space adequate for this Presence to reveal itself” (2003, p. 52).

Meaning not yet come into Creation…existing eternally.

As Bache explains “some philosophical systems, such as Vedanta, have simply swallowed the individual as a transitory illusion created by the Divine within the Divine. What is ultimately real, they have said, is not the individual but the One-without-a-second. To think otherwise is to be caught in the dualistic maze created by Brahman to know Itself from within diversity. We can experience everything that exists because in essence we are everything. In the final analysis, there is no small ‘I,’ there is only the One, The Divine Reality” (2000, p. 259).

Avens has been critical, like James Hillman, of an “artificial transplantation of Eastern values into Western soil” (1980, p. 4). His acerbic tone may be due to the spiritual imperialism, materialism and spiritual defences one can encounter in the New Age (see Lahood, 2010b) where personhood, human needs, even love between persons can be seen as egoic illusions.

This is, I believe, the ground on which non-relational transpersonal psychology grew (see Lahood, 2010b).

We can also mention in this context John Welwood’s term “spiritual by-passing,” whereby spiritual practices and beliefs are used to avoid dealing with early wounding and developmental issues (Welwood, 1984).

Interestingly, Tom Cheetham claims the figure of Jesus Christ for many Christians functions now as the heavenly guide, the Face of God’s Son (2003). It might be possible that the Face of the Vedantic or Buddhist guru functions in a similar way.

The Angel cosmology is participatory (Lakhani, 2009) suggesting a subject-object reality as espoused by participatory thinkers (e.g., Ferrer, 2002; Heron, 1998; Reason, 2003).

The Angel can also show itself as the Divine Sophia and according to Corbin is very much a feminizing process (1969).

Authoritarian spiritual ranking seems to be born from a need of comparative status (Evans, 1993) and an attempt at having the bigger picture. Christopher Bache, following Heron (1998) claims we need to give up on trying to give a definite account of the whole transpersonal field but simply bring “forward a perspective based on one’s experience” and place it in “respectful dialogue” alongside other perspectives (2000, p. 7). While I argue here for the merits of the Angel’s Shore and Prophetic muse, nowhere do I claim the Angel cosmology to be superior to other religious traditions. I am simply arguing from within the logic of the revelation and the worldview the event bestows. Nor am I pointing any fingers at other religious traditions, although I have argued that contemporary Westerners in New Age religious formulations are prone to a kind of pneuma-pathology in the form of spiritual narcissism (Lahood, 2008, 2010a, 2010b). Nevertheless, it is also impossible to ignore that religious traditions are beset with conservatism, patriarchy, exclusivism, dis-embodiment, authoritarianism and
dogmatism (see Ferrer, 2002). To give a critical appraisal of these religious traditions from a western academic critical tradition is not to claim that this position is ‘better’ than the other. Addressing spiritual narcissism simply clears a path for engaging in a more relational spiritual inquiry and through the action of therapeutic democracy limiting the narcissistic potential seemingly inherent in the human condition (see Lahood, 2010b, 2013). To follow Jeffery Kripal, the Real and Good can be revealed in the scared present in radicalized relationship. Such co-creative practice is “dynamic, uncertain, and yet hopeful—a Tikkun-like theurgical healing of the world and God” (Kripal, 2003).

34The aftershocks included an encounter with the Divine Sophia (a pristine alabaster Face rising in Glory out of the Black Light circled by a rainbow spectrum encompassing the whole of the cosmos), and an ecstatic vision of the Lotus of The Limit - a great tree in a vast world of heavenly blue blissful haze and high blue crystalline mountains—on each branch of the tree ten thousand white robed Prophets.

35Rumi (1991, p. 245)

REFERENCES


The Author

G.A. Lahood, Ph.D., is an independent scholar, psychotherapist and spiritual counselor in private practice. He is also the co-director of the Centre for Relational Spirituality in Byron Bay on the East Coast of Australia. Dr. Lahood can be contacted at www.co-inquiry.com
EDITOR’S NOTE: As a follow-up from their first article published in this journal of an 84-item scale (Goretzki, Thalbourne, & Storm, 2009), the authors developed a 30-item Spiritual Emergency Scale (SES) as a test instrument for researching spiritual emergency and related factors (Goretzki, Thalbourne, & Storm, 2013). The reader is referred to those articles for a fuller understanding. Since then, they have made a minor improvement to the Scale that they would like to offer to the readers of the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology. The following addendum includes the rationale and nuances of the update from the authors. Although Thalbourne passed away in May 2010, colleagues Goretzki and Storm opted to include him posthumously as he was an integral part of the original research.

Research Note: Updating the Spiritual Emergency Scale

Monika Goretzki, Ph.D.
Lance Storm, Ph.D.
Michael A. Thalbourne, Ph.D.

Adelaide, South Australia

As we said in Goretzki, Thalbourne, & Storm (2009),

psychosis … might be seen as the brain’s attempt to heal itself. It seems to us that the clinician’s role is to help that attempt to heal, and not simply by administering medication but also by trying to descry whether there is a pattern to the psychosis, which, once discerned, may respond rather better to talk therapy than it does at present. (p. 91)

We argue that our Spiritual Emergency Scale (SES) is a useful measure that will guide the clinician and the client through the therapeutic process. For example, Harris (2010) has found that supportive helpers, who were able to provide knowledge and/or understanding about the sufferers’ more spiritual experiences, provided a buffer to psychosis. Generally, we have found thus far that empirical studies using the SES (e.g., Bronn & McIlwain, 2014; Harris, 2010; Rooijakkers, 2013) indicate a positive movement towards greater understanding of spiritual emergency.

With a view to improving the SES, we point out that two items (item #10 and item #14—see Goretzki et al. 2013, p. 115) correlate very highly, r(107) = .74, p < .001—higher than any other pair of items. Clearly one or the other item is redundant. In the original 108-item Questionnaire (Goretzki, 2007), item #10 (i.e., Q50) and item #14 (i.e., Q85) were highly relevant to both the Unitative

E-Mail: Monika.Goretzki@unisa.edu.au

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Experiences subscale (Q50) and the Shamanic Crisis subscale (Q85), but no psychometric issues to do with item duplication arose because the Questionnaire was never a ‘stand-alone’ test instrument; we were only interested in the separate performance of each subscale and the predictive capability of each. This situation gives us opportunity to update the SES by removing item #10 and replacing it with the next highest factor-scoring item on our list in order to maintain the SES as a 30-item scale. The next highest item on our factor-score list is Q62 (“Have you ever felt that you were in the centre of huge events that had cosmic relevance and were important for the future of the world?”). This question is from the Central Archetype subscale. The revised 30-item SES is presented in Appendix A. Note that Q62 is re-numbered and listed as item #27 in order to maintain the same randomized order of the original questions as listed in Goretzki et al. (2013, pp. 113–115).

The Shamanic Crisis and Psychic Opening subscales both contribute six items to the SES; five items are from Peak Experiences; Central Archetype now contributes five; there are three from Kundalini, three from ‘Past Life’ Experience, one from Dark Night, and one from Possession. As before, there are no item contributions from the Near-Death Experience and UFO Encounter subscales. Corrected inter-item correlations ranged from .48 (an increase from .47) to .71 (a decrease from .74)—all items contributed to the Scale. Cronbach’s alpha is still a very high .94.

The theoretical range of SES scores is 0 to 30, but the actual range is 0 to 29 (as before). The mean score is 14.50 (SD = 8.47), previously 14.72 (SD = 8.52) (halfway between minimum and maximum), the median is still 16.00. Again skewness is normal, and again there is a significantly negative (low) kurtosis, z = –2.48, p = .012 (two-tailed), indicating a relatively uniform (flat) distribution.

It was again noted that the distribution of SES scores was not parametric, meaning that it did not distribute normally, which is usually indicated by a bell-shaped curve. We therefore conducted a Spearman’s test, which is suitable for nonparametric data. The relationship between the SES and the authors’ 15-item Experience of Psychotic Symptoms Scale (EPSS), to measure psychosis, was slightly stronger, and still positive and significant, r_s(106) = .72, p < .001 (two-tailed). Again, some researchers may conclude that the two scales are measuring essentially the same thing (either psychosis or spiritual emergency). To test the criterion validity of the SES, we examined the new scale’s scores in relation to three measured variables: (a) Have you ever experienced what is commonly known as a psychotic episode? (b) Were you prescribed any kind of medication? (c) Were you actually taking any medication? If the SES is in fact measuring such experiences, we would expect scores to be higher in people who report having had a psychotic episode, who were prescribed medication, and who were actually taking medication. Statistics for these three variables are presented in Table 1.

As demonstrated, people who report having experienced psychosis (n = 19) scored significantly higher on the SES than people who did not report having experienced psychosis (n = 80). Also evident is the observation that persons
prescribed medication \((n = 15)\) scored marginally higher on the SES than persons not so prescribed \((n = 90)\), and thus the effect size is very weak. Finally, there is a statistically significant difference between the mean SES scores of persons actually taking some form of medication \((n = 20)\) as opposed to those not taking medication \((n = 89)\), but the effect size is again very small. The SES appears to function in a way similar to that of the EPSS (with which it is highly correlated, as indicated in the previous paragraph), inasmuch as persons who score high on the former tend also to report experience of psychosis, as well as the taking of medication. Once again we encourage interested researchers to adopt the SES in their studies.

**REFERENCES**


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>(N)</th>
<th>(M)</th>
<th>(SD)</th>
<th>(F)</th>
<th>(p)</th>
<th>(\eta^2)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reported psychosis</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21.26</td>
<td>6.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not report psychosis</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>13.23</td>
<td>8.22</td>
<td>16.06 (a)</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescribed medication</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18.20</td>
<td>7.42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not prescribed medication</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>13.66</td>
<td>8.58</td>
<td>3.73 (b)</td>
<td>.056</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took medication</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18.35</td>
<td>7.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took no medication</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>13.63</td>
<td>8.46</td>
<td>5.22 (c)</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.05</td>
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\(a\) \(df = 1, 97\); \(b\) \(df = 1, 103\); \(c\) \(df = 1, 107\).
Introduction: This research is seeking information about extraordinary experiences that occur in the natural, un-intoxicated state, so it is important that you do not include those instances when you may have been under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Instructions: Circle ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ for each item. Raw score is total count of ‘Yes’ answers.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Have you ever lost your sense of reference as your outer and inner worlds dissolved? Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Have you ever experienced the spontaneous production of complex visual geometrical images or chants inside your head? Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Have you ever heard voices, music or the repetition of mantras, without knowing where they’re coming from? Yes / No</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Have you ever experienced intense sensations of energy and/or heat streaming along your spine? Yes / No</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Have you ever experienced the spontaneous desire to create rituals? Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Have you ever undertaken a powerful inner experience that involved a journey into another world? Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Have you ever had the ability to move into and out of non-ordinary states of consciousness at will? Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Have you ever developed a deep change in consciousness during which you lost contact with everyday reality? Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Have you ever experienced insights and/or visions, in which you received secret or sacred teachings and healing powers to take back to the “ordinary” world? Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Have you ever experienced an increased connection with animals and plants and the elemental forces of nature? Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Have you ever had the experience of dealing with something that has a divine nature and is radically different from your ordinary perception of the everyday world? Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Have you ever experienced the sense of becoming one with humanity, nature, the creative energy of the universe and/or God? Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Have you ever spontaneously attained profound insights into the nature of reality? Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Have you ever felt a sense of overcoming the usual divisions of the body and mind and reaching a state of complete inner unity and wholeness? Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Have you ever experienced going beyond your normal understanding of time and space and entered a timeless realm where these categories no longer apply? Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Have you ever been aware of the presence of spiritual entities? Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Have you ever spontaneously received accurate information about things in the past, present or future, by extra-sensory means? Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Have you ever spontaneously gained a greater understanding of the cosmos? Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Have you ever spontaneously lost your sense of identity? Yes / No</td>
</tr>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>Have you ever been able to see auras around people, animals, plants or other living things? Yes / No</td>
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<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Have you ever experienced a greater awareness of the interconnectedness of all things? Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Have you ever been overwhelmed by powerful emotions and physical sensations, concerning yourself and others in various circumstances and historical settings? Yes / No</td>
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<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Have you ever experienced living what seemed to be another life, in another time and place, in great detail? Yes / No</td>
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### APPENDIX CONTINUED

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<td>24.</td>
<td>Have you ever felt like you have personally witnessed detailed sequences of events taking place in other historical periods and/or cultures that you have had no previous exposure to?</td>
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<td>Yes / No</td>
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<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Have you ever had the need to fight off or try to control the actions of a negative being or entity?</td>
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<td>Yes / No</td>
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<td>26.</td>
<td>Have you ever experienced rich connections with mythological symbols from ancient history?</td>
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<td>Yes / No</td>
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<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Have you ever felt that you were in the centre of huge events that had cosmic relevance and were important for the future of the world?</td>
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<td>Yes / No</td>
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<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Have you ever experienced a visionary state taking you back through your own history and that of mankind to creation?</td>
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<td>Yes / No</td>
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<td>29.</td>
<td>Have you ever been aware of a cosmic battle being played out between the forces of good and evil or light and darkness?</td>
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<td>Yes / No</td>
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<td>30.</td>
<td>Have you ever experienced the destruction of an old sense of identity followed by rebirth and a renewed purpose for living?</td>
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BOOK REVIEWS


Finally, a handbook! This impressive compendium, organizing the voluminous literature of transpersonal psychology, is a remarkable achievement. Its coverage, broad and far reaching, begins with an overview of the historical origins, and then presents the expanding and evolving theory, research, and applications that have shaped the field.

This is the first comprehensive volume to rely on the field’s diverse literature as it has accumulated over many decades. As pointed out in the book’s Forward, the only other comparable effort is the Textbook of transpersonal psychiatry and psychology (Scotton, Chinen & Battista, 1996). That volume is a valuable text emphasizing a more psychiatric approach to transpersonal material, and reflects the status of the field in the mid-nineties. It could be considered a companion addition to the much larger Handbook of transpersonal psychology.

Throughout the Handbook there is an acknowledgement by various authors that the transpersonal area is perhaps the most challenging in psychology due to its elusive content, wide ranging methodologies and fundamental philosophical issues. Nevertheless, the editors set as the book’s purpose, “… clarifying and promoting the worth of transpersonal psychology.” (p. xxxi) and “… trying to advance the field by helping to define it” (p. xxvi). They also hope the collection “… can as a whole overview the area in a way that well reflects many of its facets” (p. xxix).

To begin on these major tasks the volume offers an orienting Forward by Stanley Krippner, followed by the co-editors’ very helpful Introduction. In it they raise various key issues including definitional problems, methodological conundrums, the importance of an empirical approach, and the basic question of how we know. This opening discussion also outlines the book’s structure of six major parts, and briefly announces the 38 chapters by 57 authors.

With a rich resource of this size one might be tempted to read a chapter here or there, in any order, according to one’s interests and proclivities. This can be fruitful if the reader is already familiar with the field. However, to get a full sense of this Handbook, it could be more productive to read the chapters in sequence because they often follow-on well, one laying groundwork for another. Sometimes one piece will raise points or take positions that are also dealt with, supported or critiqued in a follow-on chapter.

Part I begins with the unexpected “A Brand for the Burning” by authors Hartelius, Rothe and Roy, which argues that to be more effective transpersonal psychology needs to be ‘rebranded’. They report finding 160 definitions of the field in its literature (many in JTP). After examining the themes, concepts and
language of the definitions, they propose a new one, woven from identified intersecting strands:

Transpersonal psychology is a transformative psychology of the whole person in intimate interrelationship with an interconnected and evolving world; it pays special attention to self-expansive states as well as spiritual, mystical, and other exceptional human experiences that gain meaning in such a context. (p. 14)

Whether or not one finds this kind of definition completely adequate, it is literature research based and has an open dynamic that could easily stimulate further research and theory construction. The chapter closes with a study of trends in research methods, geographical distribution of authors, and author gender.

I paid special attention to Chapter 2, “Traditional Roots, History and Evolution of the Transpersonal Perspective,” having been part of the founding group that launched the field via the publication of this Journal in 1969. Michael Daniels’ rendering of the roots and history is faithful to the facts and tone of the thinking and influences of those early years. Reviewing the evolution of the field over the decades he identifies religious, psychological, humanistic/existential/feminist, and ecological perspectives in transpersonal psychology. From this he constructs an integral perspective model. His closing observations are pointed ‘challenges’ to anyone identified with transpersonal psychology.

The use of the label ‘spiritual psychology’ as an alternative to ‘transpersonal psychology’ is thoroughly examined in Chapter 3, which finds good reason to stick with the latter. Following on nicely in Chapter 4 is “Criticisms of Transpersonal Psychology and Beyond.” An informed and constructive critic inside the field is a gift in this Handbook, especially when it results in a fresh proposal for a “science and culture of consciousness.” Chapters 2 and 4 together should be regarded as essential reading for anyone guided by, promoting, teaching or contributing to this field.

In Part II the focus is on theory. It opens with Stanislav Grof’s “Revision and Re-Enchantment of Psychology” tracing his 50 years of consciousness research and an explication of his theory of ‘holotropic states.’ The next chapter, “Altered States of Consciousness,” is Charles Tart’s well researched approach to the study of consciousness, considered from pre-history to our era. Then, Jung’s Analytical Psychology, Jungian transpersonal theory, and Washburn’s related approach are reviewed by Alan G. Vaughn in Chapter 7. Next is Sri Aurobindo’s evolutionary, yogic levels of consciousness philosophy rendered in an integral psychological model. In Chapter 9, “Transcend and Include,” Allan Combs presents the five ‘phases’ of Ken Wilber’s psychologies and worldviews. Wilber, who began publishing in JTP in 1975, and is perhaps the most widely published theorist in this field, dis-identified from the transpersonal psychology label sometime in the 1980’s. Eventually he began using a
more ‘integral’ model incorporating holons, each with inner and outer, singular and plural quadrants.

Co-editor Hartelius and Jorge N. Ferrer, after critiquing perennial and integral philosophies, advance a ‘participatory philosophy’ in Chapter 10. It emphasizes that spiritual and mystical experiences are participatory events and ontologically real. It also holds that self and world, part and whole, shape each other reciprocally in an ongoing process of mutually transforming participation. Co-editor Friedman, in a personal narrative (Chapter 11), describes the development of his concept of Self-expansiveness as a scientific construct, and its wide-ranging utility in assessment, therapy, theory, and research. Finally, in “Neuroscience and the Transpersonal,” we get a sense of the productivity of bringing these two fields together, relying on extensive neurophysiological research and an informed understanding of transpersonal phenomena. The citations are recent, with 70 percent of the references published since 2002.

Part III shows how far transpersonal methodology has progressed since the first issue of JTP in 1969 aligned the new field with an empirical approach (Sutich, 1969a). Rosemarie Anderson and William Braud lead off with an overview of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed research methods developed over more than twenty years. Their work shows how the challenges of doing research in this field have led to improvements and refinements in research methodologies. Their transpersonal approaches include intuitive, integral, and organic inquiries, and possible future directions. Next, Charles D. Laughlin and Adam J. Rock, discuss neurophenomenology, describing the connection between cognitive science and the practice of transcendental phenomenology. In Chapter 15 Douglas A. MacDonald and Friedman dive into and sort out the large number of assessment tools dealing with transpersonal and spiritual constructs, and offer specific recommendations for researchers. Friedman in the following chapter critiques the uses of ‘grand theories’ and ‘mini theories’ in transpersonal psychology and argues, rather effectively, for more productive ‘middle range theories.’ Chapter 17, by MacDonald, looks closely at issues in the philosophical underpinnings of transpersonal psychology as a science, a very helpful way to conclude this strong section.

Part IV, “Transpersonal Experiences,” is approximately the half-way point in this substantial work. From here on some of the authors are longstanding names in the field, and others are more recent contributors from a variety of backgrounds and affiliations. This section begins with the category exceptional human experiences (EHE’s): mystical, psychic, encounter, unusual death related, exceptional performances, healing, desolation/nadir and dissociation human experiences, studied for their meanings and transformative potentials. Chapter 19 discusses the dimensions and theories of psychedelic-induced experiences and directions for future research. Near-death experiences with a focus on helping ‘NDErs’ are next. It is followed by Chapter 21 exploring the myths and history of spirituality and sex, examining the role of sacred and transpersonal sex today, and concluding by affirming the reconciliation power of transformative sexual experience. Lastly, the chapter on parapsychology...
considers psi-conducive stimulus conditions, the psychology of belief in psi, and the relationship between parapsychology and transpersonal psychology.

Part V, the largest section with 10 chapters, takes on “Transpersonal Approaches to Transformation, Healing and Wellness.” Chapter 23 offers a transpersonal and clinical perspective on non-ordinary states of consciousness as they relate to mental health, including pathologizing spirituality, transcending egoic boundaries, diversity issues, spiritual emergency, differential diagnosis, and treatment. The “Meditation” chapter, with over 200 references, covers empirical research and future directions, and recognizes that transpersonal psychology played a pivotal role in making meditation accessible to Western psychology. The difference between Chapter 19’s discussion of psychedelic experiences and Chapter 25’s focus on psychedelics is the latter’s emphasis on cultural context, psychobiology, various therapies and wider implications. Next, “Transpersonal Dimensions of Somatic Therapies,” a partly personal narrative, weaves specific practices and somatic systems together with larger social, ecological and transpersonal considerations.

Continuing in Part V, Chapter 27, “Hypnosis and Transpersonal Psychology,” recounts the haphazard historical development of hypnosis, and takes “A transpersonal look” at clinical hypnosis, and in particular the Ericksonian, socio-cognitive, and medical/health traditions. The connections to transpersonal psychology are also explored in this advocacy piece, which, oddly, provides no definition of hypnosis (one can be found in Chapter 6, p. 131). An empirical approach opens the next chapter, on “Dreaming,” a brief but strong review of related states of consciousness, transformational aspects, purposes and functions, phenomenological research, and dream understanding and practices. “Expressive and Creative Arts Therapies,” Chapter 29, clarifies the distinctions between them, examines their benefit and supportive research, considers epistemological issues (e.g., “… healing on multiple levels from various way of knowing”) and then briefly outlines the major therapies: art, dance/movement, drama, psychodrama, and music. Chapter 30 reviews 9 psychospiritual integrative practices, examining one (Psychospiritual Integrative Therapy) in depth, and concludes with many recommended research options. The “Diamond Approach,” described as a modern Western teaching of human development and as a spiritual path living a life engaged with the world, is presented in some detail, and then assessed in Chapter 31. The last chapter in Part V is “Transpersonal Psychotherapies.” It stresses the essential role of consciousness, the special role for spirituality, offers an explanatory framework for the process, considers identity and development, and discusses relevant research and future trends.

Part VI, the final section of this most useful resource, relates transpersonal psychology to a wide range of disciplines and perspectives. It opens with “Ecopsychology” in Chapter 33, presenting its history, core themes, and practices, followed by a consideration of related transpersonal dimensions, e.g., “… realizing the natural world as a portal to the transpersonal” (p. 608). Chapter 34, “Feminist and Cultural Contributions to Transpersonal Psychology,” is concerned with the lack of integration of spiritual perspectives in
feminist practices and explores the intersection of transpersonalism and womanism. It also speaks to a transpersonal relinking of mind-body-spirit, and seeks a more inclusive cultural, philosophical and methodological approach to research and theory building.

The sub-title of Chapter 35, “The Emergence of Transpersonal Social Engagement” (TSE), indicates the early stage of work in this form of inquiry and action connecting psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions and then extending them from an individual focus to collective applications. This is a ‘big picture’ challenge to the field, and I came away from this on-target discussion with the impression that TSE could be an access-bridge between global issues in general and most of the content areas discussed in this Handbook. The next chapter is “Modern Miracles from Ancient Medicine,” focusing on ‘transpersonal medicine’ and ‘transformative moments.’ The emphasis is on “...healing from beyond the self” (p. 641). Although there are some individual case examples with outcome observations and several reports of successful healing treatments with multiple patients, there is no discussion of placebo processes and few alternative explanations for the positive treatment results claimed. This important topic area needs more development than is reported in this anecdotally styled, mostly personal narrative.

Chapter 37 returns to the arts, not as therapy per se, but as a primary mode to access transpersonal and transcendent realms. It explores science, language and the arts, how artists experience the transpersonal, the social-cultural availability of art, and the ways a transpersonal art can be regained as everyday experience. The author’s language is creative, combining a poetic-activist temperament with a minimum of art jargon, and asserts a transpersonal/social values context for art, broadly defined. Obviously there is a wider, massive literature on the religious-spiritual-transcendental aspects of art that cannot be included in a brief piece, but I would add here Transpersonal Images, the 1983 color-plate catalogue from the 8th International Conference of the International Transpersonal Association. Especially relevant is the exhibition essay by Roger Lipsey (1983), who later published the pioneering volume, An art of our own: The spiritual in twentieth century art (Lipsey, 1997).

The Handbook’s final chapter, 38, is not a summary or concluding essay but an affirming view of “Transpersonal Education,” which is defined as, “…including transpersonal content and qualities that involve the process and practice through which these qualities might be discovered or re-discovered, identified, cultivated, integrated and applied ...” (p. 671). The text explores the differences between transpersonal psychology, transformative education, spiritual education and transpersonal education. It explores cross-cultural worldviews, examines two transpersonal schools/institutes, looks at connections to conventional classrooms, and includes the way of self-education.

This generously documented Handbook also provides an Appendix listing “Transpersonal Journals, Doctoral-Granting Schools Offering Transpersonal Programs, and Transpersonal Organizations,” with capsule descriptions of each. One correction in the entry for JTP: The Journal was founded [in 1969] followed
by the development of the Association for Transpersonal Psychology in 1972 (not vice versa). Also, the book overall has some typographical errors and some minor language awkwardness, most of which, however, can be easily understood. The index is helpful but not sufficiently detailed, and the figure and table numbers appear among the page numbers in the index and are difficult to find, and would have been more usefully rendered as separate listings.

I had a strong de ja vu experience reading Chapter 5. It appears that Grof’s chapter is quite similar to his article (with a nearly identical title) in *JTP* 2012, No. 2 (Grof, 2012), which the Handbook does not note or cite. There are some changes. There is barely a mention of Wilber in the 2012 article, but a pronounced shift to an elaborate comparison of Wilber’s 1980 schema with Grof’s developmental theory in the Handbook. A psychiatric training incident not in the article is discussed in detail in Chapter 5. Overall, some article references are dropped and others are added in the Handbook. Readers unaware of the original article might not know of an apparent shift in Grof’s thinking or sources. The Handbook could have followed the example of its acknowledgement for Chapter 15, p. 296 (the only such acknowledgement in 38 chapters), where the note acknowledges that chapter’s material as an “adaptation of,” is “based upon” and, finally, is a “version of” a paper that was previously published. For whatever reason, in the case of the Grof material in Chapter 5, the editors or publisher missed an opportunity to connect some significant literature of the field.

I was curious about the frequency of references in the entire book for each of the 8 periodicals listed as Transpersonal Journals. A quick tabulation rendered as percentages showed the *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies = 13%; Journal of Consciousness Studies = 9%; Journal of Humanistic Psychology = 10%; Journal of Transpersonal Psychology = 45%; Journal of Transpersonal Research = 1%; Revision: A Journal of Consciousness and Transformation = 4%; The Humanistic Psychologist = 16%; Transpersonal Psychology Review = 2%*. These data suggest that although the *JHP* has published for 53 years, *JTP*’s 45 volume years concentrating on the field may account for its high reference count.

I was also interested in the in the recency of all references, simply counting all, of any medium, with dates from the 19th century through 2002 (about 160 years), and those with dates of 2003 or later (the ten years prior to the book’s publication). The percentages are 55% through 2002 and 45% the last ten years. This may indicate authors’ preference for a growing current literature, and its growing wider availability.

Regarding the availability of the Handbook itself, yes, this is the essential compendium for the field, and yes it is expensive. However, any library serious about its psychology holdings, and perhaps some individuals, should find a way to have it. For anyone really involved in transpersonal psychology or transpersonal studies, access to this landmark resource may be a necessity.

One of the limitations for any handbook attempting to cover a wide literature is the necessity to write in summary style, condensing explanations, descriptions
and data, and sometimes only mentioning important and richly developed sources. To illustrate, in Chapter 35, “Widening Circles,” the style is scholarly, bringing up in a moderate tone a wide range of transpersonal social engagement (TSE) issues. The content, however, deals directly with major concerns such as global crises, spiritual narcissism, sacred activism, and other crucial contemporary issues, including liberation psychologies. The discussion of this latter topic relies on the work of Watkins and Shulman (2010) and their soundly argued advocacy for “… peaceful, just, and ecologically vibrant communities that support psychological well-being” (p. 10). Many other chapters are also quick summary guides to a deep and essential literature, which, in most cases, is well worth digging into.

Yet, even with coverage as broad as this Handbook’s, the editors acknowledge some gaps. These include the relationship between transpersonal psychology and numerous religious traditions with transpersonal insights; the transcendentalist and syncretistic traditions, e.g., theosophy; various organizational and management systems. Perhaps the most serious omission is not probing the problem of misuse of transpersonal knowledge. Examples the editors recognize are cases of guru abuse, spiritual bypass, and totalitarian evil. It may come as a surprise to some individuals and groups with transpersonal interests that knowledge of this dimension of human experience, like any other science or discipline, can be used for good or ill. This reality necessarily raises the inevitable question: What values and purposes are to be pursued, what is the good?

When I was asked to review this volume I did not know that reading through it would refresh so much of my experience from the founding years and the decades that followed. I can now see how theorizing in the field has tended to move from an almost exclusively vertically organized model (higher or deeper consciousness, hierarchical levels of development, ascending or descending evolution, etc.) to, in recent years, a more mixed model that includes horizontal vectors (broader or wider consciousness, concentric nested development, expanding or contracting dynamics). This seems to me a healthy shift, more inclusive of diverse cultures, more accommodating of both individual and group development, with a more grounded real-world connection. Also I see that the empirical approach to transpersonal phenomena, set out in JTP in 1969 (Sutich, 1969a), is still likely to be the most productive and credible way to advance the field. It has also been a relief to see that well informed ‘in-house’ criticism of some aspects of transpersonal psychology also offers alternatives. For example, I found author Walach’s proposal, in Chapter 5, to link transpersonal psychology to a “science and culture of consciousness” an intriguing possible option to give new direction to the field.

At the beginning of this book the editors set out their goals. Have they accomplished them?

Returning to their purposes listed at the opening of this review, first it seems they have certainly clarified and promoted the worth of transpersonal psychology, at the same time acknowledging its current limitations and incompleteness. They have also advanced the field by conducting extensive
literature research to synthesize a representative definitional statement, as quoted above previously. They wisely offer it as “one such attempt” with various heuristic advantages, rather than as a final ideological position. This is consistent with the original intent of the founding JTP editor, who in the first issue, carefully outlined his view of,

... the role of definitions and statements of purpose in relation to the historical emergence of new forces in psychology. Definitions and statements of purpose are understood to be formulations subject to change as required by the development of objective living conditions, relationships, forces, etc. that they may represent. (Sutich, 1969b)

Stated another way, as a field or discipline evolves so may its definition.

Finally, does the Handbook well reflect many of the facets of the area? This field is a rough-cut jewel to be sure, with many odd-angled facets, and the book’s many authors consider the vast majority of them. Although some chapters handle the summarizing overview style better than others a few seem somewhat underdeveloped. However, as a whole, I found that the Handbook not only brings forward the range and complexity of the field, but it does so in a generally expansive and encouraging voice that points toward a promising future for a field that could be on the way to becoming a discipline.

There are, it may be argued, additional facets that should be examined. There could be more emphasis on specialized contemporary transpersonally influenced practices (e.g., eclectic monasticism, eco-pilgrimage, high-risk professional service); more focus on the varieties of the experience of aging, illness and death (not just NDE’s, EHE’s, or dramatic rarities); more on the values and ethical aspects of living by various transpersonal identifications (e.g., the psychology of compassion as practiced in secular, spiritual, or religious paths); more attention to transpersonal phenomena arising out of trauma, violence, disasters, deprivation, epidemics, war, and our attempts to survive, mitigate or transcend them. To bring a transpersonal focus to these concerns is to recognize that “at all levels and in all societies, transpersonal experiences and beliefs can affect human relationships, life philosophies, reactions to death and bereavement, education, and responses to economic hardship and natural disasters” and that “transpersonal concerns, experiences and beliefs have arguably been one of the most potent influences upon human behaviour throughout history” (Fontana & Slack, 1996)1.

Clearly transpersonal psychology has grown and been refined by focusing on the nature of historical and modern consciousness, as it is found in its existing individual, social, environmental or cultural contexts. But new conditions are being created every day, and it may be time for the field to face and begin to deal with the rapidly approaching future of new scientific, technological, and cultural conditions. I refer to how human consciousness and its transpersonal dimensions may be affected by artificial intelligence, cyber-human interfaces, brain plasticity alterations, neurocognitive training, virtual reality systems, surgical and pharmacological interventions, genetic modifications, the world-wide web,
increasing public and private surveillance, and others. For example should we view the internet as “the nervous system of the 21st century” [italic in the original] (Doctorow, 2014), or expect that “the greatest benefit of the arrival of artificial intelligence is that AIs will help define humanity” (Kelly, 2014)? Can we completely dismiss self-contradicting notions such as ‘spiritual machines’ or ‘meditating robots’? What are the limits of human invention and creativity? What are the ultimate capacities of the human psyche and of transpersonal consciousness?

If this field can anticipate how human awareness and its culture may be impacted by these and other such discoveries, inventions, and practices it may be able to contribute profoundly to what humanity can be in the era that awaits us. Is this too speculative? Too far into the future? Too ‘sci-fi’? Hardly. Most of these technologies or practices exist today and are developing in capability and complexity. And they are emerging in a world that is struggling with a growing and painful recognition of its potentialities, its conflicts, and its limitations. Any or all of these factors may shape the evolving transpersonal field, and any coming “science and culture of consciousness.” Given what can be seen from where we are today, it seems our field is more likely to have a future if it engages the future that is arising all around us.

NOTE

These statements are excerpts from “The need for transpersonal psychology,” an article that provided the basis for the rationale that led to the successful formation of the Transpersonal Psychology Section of the British Psychological Society in 1996. The authors presented a strong call for the formal recognition of a broadly historical, culturally diverse, globally active, and scientifically based transpersonal psychology. Their forward looking and thoughtful argument may be even more relevant nearly 20 years later.

REFERENCES


The Editors

_Harry L. Friedman_, Ph.D., is a former Research Professor of Psychology (Retired, University of Florida), Professor Emeritus at Saybrook University, USA, and a clinical and organizational psychologist. He serves as Senior Editor of the *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, Associate Editor of *The Humanistic Psychologist*, and is a Fellow of the American Psychological Association. He is Past President of the International Transpersonal Association and the current Chair of the Transpersonal Psychology Interest Group of the APA’s Society for Humanistic Psychology. He has published extensively in transpersonal psychology.

_Glenn Hartelius_, Ph.D., served on core faculty at Sofia University in Palo Alto, California, and taught at Naropa University in Colorado. He is currently Associate Professor in the East-West Psychology Program at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco and is building an on-line Ph.D. program in integral and transpersonal psychology. He is Editor of the *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, and Secretary of the International Transpersonal Association. He teaches meditation and attentional training skills internationally, and has published in the fields of transpersonal psychology and consciousness studies.

The Reviewer

_Miles A. Vich_, M.A., D.H.L. (hon.) has served in various roles, 1962–1999, in the fields of humanistic and transpersonal psychology, including Editor of the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, as a founding Board member of the Transpersonal Institute, as Editor of *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* and Executive Director of the Association for Transpersonal Psychology. Since retiring in 2000 he has archived many transpersonal documents in the ITP (now Sofia University) Library, Palo Alto, California, and many humanistic era documents in the University of California, Davidson Library, Santa Barbara. He serves on the Board of Editors of *JTP* where he is an occasional contributor. He is also pursuing a longstanding interest in art.

* * * * *

No Bosses, No Meetings, No Problem!

What if you worked in an organization without a boss? Without middle managers? Without staff functions like human resources, legal, accounting or IT? Without meetings? Fine, maybe, if there are only 6–8 employees, but what if there are 40,000 spread around the world?

Former Associate Partner with traditional organization consulting firm McKinsey & Company Frederic Laloux has accomplished what many developmental psychologists have been eagerly awaiting: Identifying the next stage of social collectives, especially work organizations. Cultural and organizational theorists have previously sketched the evolution of collectives from small groups, such as hunter-gatherers, clan- and tribal-based societies, to civilizations that provide law and order through hierarchy and social roles, a pattern reflected in most large organizations today. Beyond that, capitalistic societies or meritocracies, and socialistic-communistic societies or participatory organizations appeared. Theorists have posited that such collective forms reflect stages of individual development, but until now no one has identified a collective form parallel to Maslow’s self-actualized stage, the jumping-off point from “doingness” to “beingness” and from the personal to the transpersonal.

In Reinventing Organizations: A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness, Laloux has done exactly that: Identified an organization form—not in theory, but in actuality—that embodies the values and assumptions of self-actualization. Laloux’s work utilizes the developmental language originating with Clare Graves adopted and updated by Ken Wilber and his followers, which identifies developmental stages by color. Thus what is familiar to most people as Maslow’s Self-Actualization (a stage whose qualities have been differently labeled and elaborated by Graves, Kegan, Loevinger, Cook-Greuter, and Wade) is called Teal in this book. Laloux focuses on Teal organizations, and lays out simple organization theory using Wilber’s four-quadrant model. The first part of the book is a recapitulation of this basic developmental theory.

Reinventing Organizations is not a theoretical book: It’s a research case study of actual organizations Laloux has investigated that are operating at the Teal level, characterized by self-management, wholeness, and evolutionary purpose. He distills the way such organizations are structured, how their infrastructure and processes work, what they practice, and the norms and values that characterize their cultures. Most of all, these are unusually successful organizations, according to both traditional bottom-line measures and those
considered most important on a balanced score-card: Highly committed, fulfilled workers whose talents are optimally engaged in meaningful work.

The principles of self-management of Teal organizations do not resemble those of traditional participatory organizations. Instead they embrace the assumptions of positive psychology without the need for either hierarchy or consensus. Wholeness assumes that people bring much more than one role-based set of skills or competencies to work and that they are much more than workers. Unlike most work organizations whose strategic planning is focused on predicting and controlling the future, Teal organizations focus on what the organization as a whole wants to become and what purpose it wants to serve. Case histories show how these principles work in practice.

The organizations named and featured in the research are headquartered in the Netherlands, the US, Germany, and France. Some are small businesses with fewer than 100 employees, but many are global with tens of thousands of employees. The businesses range from non-profit and public sector to for-profit, from education and healthcare to manufacturing and energy. How they function and how they are structured is a radical departure from the organization forms that have gone before. Laloux distills the data into basic principles, including using his experience to show how to start such an organization or transition an existing one to the higher forms of Teal. He also indicates what common challenges are, and how organizations—some of them among the ones he researched—can depart from these lofty stages and fall back into the ones more common in today’s world.

*Reinventing Organizations* is a paradigm shift for how people work together. Like any bold new step, it is exciting and will certainly appear risky or even unimaginable to some. It requires embracing transpersonal values, paradox, and uncertainty, and doing so with tenacity. It takes a spirit of adventure and vast vision. Laloux has outlined the practices to realize them.

The Author
Frederic Laloux, Ph.D., is an internationally experienced coach, consultant and change agent based in Brussels. Formerly with a global consulting company, his career has focused on helping organizations and individuals achieve higher collective and personal purpose through work.

The Reviewer
Jenny Wade, Ph.D., is an organization and leadership development consultant specializing in research and development of proprietary diagnostic, developmental, and change technologies. A developmental psychologist, she teaches at Sofia University (formerly the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology).

While at training at the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich, I was on the staff at the Klinik am Zürichberg, an in-patient Jungian psychiatric hospital housed in an elegant Beaux Arts villa on the Dolderberg, the patrician quarter of Zurich. At a staff meeting one morning in 1978, Dr. Heinrich Fierz, medical director and student of Jung, was presented with a request from a colleague to have access to some of the remaining LSD in the clinic’s pharmacy and to use the comfortable clinic facilities for a controlled psychedelic experience. Rather than take the request seriously, Fierz and his senior staff dismissed the idea by making light of it and declaring that they “didn’t need artificial means to explore their unconscious!” Nothing of any value would come of it, they opined. I was and am still dismayed at their reaction.

It was that dismay that prompted me to agree to review Dr. Scott J. Hill’s comprehensive volume, the first significant reconsideration of psychedelics in light of Jungian psychology since the 1950s. In fact, what Dr. Hill has created is a sourcebook for those interested in such a natural interface for the compelling reason that Jung’s work is a psychology of inner exploration and, understood properly, psychedelics or entheogens can be an ideal tool in this endeavor. Moreover, its publication coincides with a renewed interest in psychedelics in terms of research and their clinical utility and the revaluation of something culturally long forbidden.

Influenced by a traumatic psychedelic experience as a young adult and by his doctoral work into the nature of Jungian psychology, a significant portion of this book focuses on those two areas with such chapters as *Basic Jungian Concepts and Principles, Psychedelic Experience and Trauma, Psychedelic Experience and the Shadow, Psychedelic Experience and Psychosis, Psychosis in Jung’s Psychology* and the like. While informative, the text can read at times like a dissertation or primer in Jungian psychology. For an introductory reader such information is invaluable; but for anyone moderately familiar with Jung and his work it can be slow going. Therefore, I would like to highlight what I believe to be the valuable core of Dr. Hill’s effort; namely, his distillation of what links both Jungian depth work with psychedelic experience and the dilemma of their integration.

The core of the Jungian endeavor that is undertaken intentionally is to experience the unconscious with its vital imagery, affective power, and numinous or larger than life felt sense while maintaining a reflective or conscious standpoint in relation to it. In so doing, Jung teaches us, consciousness comes into a dynamic working relationship with the unknown parts of the psyche called the unconscious. This dynamic relationship is the engine that drives individuation, or becoming who we are intended to be. In order to engage this process, the threshold of consciousness, or how strongly the ego maintains its sense of order and control, must be explicitly forsaken to some extent, or “lowered,” in order to allow the contents of the unknown parts of the psyche to “rise to the surface of consciousness” and be known. This lowering can be accomplished by way of
entering the symbolic space of dream analysis, visual imagery that Jung called “active imagination,” and also by way of certain types of automatic writing, art making and various yoga or relaxation techniques. Another pathway to lowering the threshold of consciousness, and this is to my mind a pearl of great price in this text, is of course the use of mind-altering substances such as psychedelics. Dr. Hill makes this point clear and by elaborating on it, he links Jungian inner work to inner work potentiated by the use of psychedelics. This is Dr. Hill’s singular contribution to the subject at hand.

For Jungian readers a second and more challenging point that Dr. Hill fields is whether or not the psychedelically mediated encounter with the unconscious, even under therapeutic or controlled circumstances, is authentically transformative. Can it be integrated? Can it be deeply worked and understood in the most conscious manner? Or, is it effectively bypassing the hard fought work of depth introspection on the one hand, and positively too dangerous on the other? This was the central dilemma for Jung himself and eminent students such as Michael Fordham and Heinrich Fierz. Focusing on the passivity of the psychedelic experience, they felt that the psychedelic agent “diminishes” the capacity of consciousness to engage in the transformative process. The diminution of this capacity to be present consciously, and with agency in the experience, can only have a negative impact on the meaningful integration of what the unconscious brings forth under such circumstances. Though the “doors of perception” might be opened wide, they thought, it does not guarantee what is perceived will be truly “seen.”

Dr. Hill once again marshals his considerable research base and in a skillful and balanced manner discusses these issues by calling to our attention, on the one hand, to the work of early Jungian advocates and practitioners of psychedelically assisted analytic work such as Ronald Sandison and Margot Cutner and, on the other, to the significant contributions of Stanislav Grof, Myron Stolaroff and, most recently, the researchers at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine among many others. All are favorably inclined toward and are convinced that the psychedelically assisted encounters with the unconscious hold tremendous potential for personal transformation or, as Jung called it, “individuation.”

Dr. Scott Hill has written a big book about a thorny subject and I, for one, am extremely grateful, though my few words scarcely do it justice. Speaking as a seeker after consciousness, it is about time that someone called our attention back to the potential value of the psychedelic experience as a bona fide agent in personal transformation. And speaking as a Jungian analyst, it is about time that serious consideration of and openness to it should replace the quick judgment and summary dismissal I witnessed so long ago.

The Author

Scott J. Hill, Ph. D., lives in Sweden, where he conducts scholarly research on the intersection between psychedelic studies and Jungian psychology. He holds degrees in psychology from the University of Minnesota and in philosophy and religion from the California Institute of Integral Studies.
SANGEETHA MENON: A Response to


Thanks to Brian Les Lancaster’s review of my book *Brain, Self and Consciousness: Explaining the conspiracy of experience* (Menon, 2014) I could discover several lines of enquiry that need interdisciplinary engagement. Having expressed my gratitude to Les for his thorough reading of the book, I wish to respond to some of the issues that he has flagged in his review.

Why do I ask several questions in this book? Yes, that itself is a question! Here are a few reasons. First, to clarify that to explore a complex phenomenon such as consciousness, which in some way or the other influences human experience, an array of conceptual tools that are inclusive and less reductive are needed. Second, several questions that I ask in the book are open-ended puzzles that simply vanish in the reductive frameworks of contemporary cognitive neuroscience. And, the primary (puzzle) being how does the self influence the brain, and ‘who’ is the beholder of experience. Third, perhaps as Les also perceived, one way of getting some answers for a complex problem is by asking more questions that bring in issues that are otherwise submerged in analytical rigor and empirical evidence. Les writes:

…it remains unclear as to how a research-based approach might substantiate Menon’s proposals about a core-self that is not dependent on a physical base. …the epistemological basis whereby we might satisfactorily demonstrate the value of mystical ideas that do not fit into the dominant physicalist paradigm … (p. 133)

It is possible that at times we derive theoretical concepts from empirical work. We also take the path of first theorizing bare concepts and subsequently using them for designing an experiment. The concept of core-self for sure does not
have a neural correlate. Also, I do not even know how to suggest an experiment to demonstrate the existence of the core-self. At the same time, core-self to me is not a concept that is bordered by mysticism, but the essence of the philosophical analysis of experience, its content, and the beholder of experience. To me, philosophically the concept of core-self is essential to ground the otherwise fleeting experiences of the embodied self, and indicate the possibility of transformation. Today, cognitive neuroscience bases its assumptions and positions on deeper ideas about experience such as the self (though to refute it). Given such a scenario when it is no more just the Turing test that is important to understand what is uniquely human, the deeper philosophical concepts that I present in my book are open to discussions and evaluations based on the criteria of cognitive neurosciences.

Often a concept is considered mystical if it is philosophically argued but not evidenced through empirical work. Let us take for instance, the Cartesian mind-body divide. Any act of thinking, according to Descartes suggests the presence of a conscious thinker. Such a theoretical stance was not based on empirically validated work, but a clear intuition that was available to him. The ‘conscious thinker’ idea of Descartes, though implied a biological correlate such as the pineal gland, led to the consideration of consciousness as a phenomenon riddled with mysticism and unrecognized by science. To say categorically that no such thing called self exists at any time Metzinger (2009) has hardly used substantial arguments in support with empirical evidence. While in the recent past many conjectures have been presented on the neural correlates of the functions of consciousness, the ‘hard problem’ itself is not resolved in neuroscience, since no single biological correlate has been identified as the seat of the qualitative nature of consciousness as a whole. It seems that history of mind-body philosophy and science repeats its stance (of addressing a phenomenon as mystical) whenever a philosophical concept is not grounded in biology, and biological determinism that has no place for the exclusive self, is not favored.

The central arguments and theses that I present in this book are contextualized within the current trends in cognitive sciences and brain studies. The book enlists some of the major concerns within the larger space of consciousness studies, while also marking the pitfalls that are found in the overzealous reductive theories on consciousness. My critiques are in specific of the minimalist rendering of the experiential, social and emotional self. Definitely a writer’s ideas are influenced by the philosophical foundations of her beliefs. From that angle, the Indian philosophical system of Advaita Vedanta has subliminally helped me shape some of my ideas in this book. But in this book I intentionally kept away the dialogues between Advaita Vedanta and the various Buddhist traditions, and an exclusive presentation of Vedanta philosophy itself, since that is simply not the focus of the subject matter of the book. The major goal of the book is to present ‘consciousness’ from a unitary and organic point of view, by reviewing the challenges that brain and self give each other. And, I believe this is best done by reviewing and interpreting the current cognitive science literature, and also resurfacing the
common intuitions about one-self that get washed away by the torrents of linear thinking and reductive frameworks.

One question that Les raises in his review is how can the organic nature of the self be reconciled with its being non-embodied. This apparently insolvable puzzle is also perhaps the central theme of my book – that how we understand the self, which on one side encompasses our experience in its entirety and on the other seems to be that beacon light which beckons and leads us to the shore when our usual self is challenged. Such a riddle can be resolved only if we understand the dynamic nature of the self.

The argument that favors a synaptic, fleeting self is that every experience has a subject of its own and as experiences appear and disappear, the selves also appear and disappear. The central problem in such an argument that takes experience to be the causal agent for the self is that it cannot account for the very existence of experience in the first place. To have a self that experiences the experience at any given moment it is necessary for the subject to have continued from a previous experience. Experience itself is influenced by the continuity of the experiencer as a continuing self who contributes to the content of each experience with his or her memories, choices, attitudes and responses.

The self is not a point of awareness that exists for a moment, disappears the next moment and then reappears later. Our existence is experienced in the form of an agentive self of the action, not just for that moment, but for all moments that preceded and are yet to come. Such continuity is definitely influenced and customized by the moral choices, culture and the life styles we adopt so as to present our personal identities. Yet there are universal and trans-cultural factors, which are not experienced in specific fashion but are ‘felt’ deeply and relied upon when the default self or the body faces psychiatric or physical challenges. One such factor is the ‘core-self.’

We learn more about the ‘core-self’ by distinguishing it (conceptually, experientially, and if possible empirically) from its look-alike ‘body-sense,’ and, by delineating its varied expressions in the cases of spiritual experiences, neuro-psychiatric and physical challenges. Well, that almost introduces the project for my next book!

References


The Author

Brian Les Lancaster, Ph.D., is Emeritus Professor of Transpersonal Psychology at Liverpool John Moores University, UK, and Honorary Research Fellow in the Centre for Jewish Studies at Manchester University. He is currently Chair of the Transpersonal Psychology Section of the British Psychological Society, and President of the International Board of the International Transpersonal Association. Les’ research interests focus on the cognitive neuroscience of consciousness and the psychology of mysticism, with a specific focus on the Kabbalah. Over his career, Les has disseminated key aspects of consciousness studies and transpersonal psychology to a wide audience, both academic and more popular. He is committed to the value of transpersonal perspectives in a range of professional areas, including coaching, therapy and management, and is currently Academic Dean for Transpersonal Psychology at the Professional Development Foundation, UK. He runs online postgraduate programmes validated by Middlesex University, UK (www.ita-professional.org). In addition to many journal articles, Les’ published works include Mind Brain and Human Potential, winner of a Science and Medical Network Best Book Award, The Elements of Judaism, Approaches to Consciousness: The Marriage of Science and Mysticism, and The Essence of Kabbalah.

The Reviewer

Sangeetha Menon, Ph.D., is a professor at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore, India, and heads the Consciousness Studies programme of NIAS. She is a nominated member of the International Society for Science and Religion (Cambridge), a Board Member of the International Association for Transpersonal Psychology, and a Council Member of the Indian Council of Philosophical Research, Ministry of Human Resources Development, Government of India. Professor Menon has coedited Consciousness, Experience and Ways of Knowing: Perspectives from Science, Philosophy and the Arts (2006); Science and Beyond: Cosmology, Consciousness and Technology in Indic Traditions (2004); Consciousness and Genetics (2002); and Scientific and Philosophical Studies on Consciousness (1999); authored Beyond Experience: Consciousness in the Gita, and coauthored Dialogues: Philosopher Meets Seer. She has visited and spoken at many universities in India, the United States, England, Australia, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, and Moscow. She has been visiting professor at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, Oxford University, and at the Nanzan Institute of Religion and Culture, Nanzan University, Japan. She was invited to be a panellist at the World Parliament of Religions, Melbourne, in 2009. Apart from her academic interests, she writes poetry, fiction and is an avid photographer, artist and web-designer. She also engages in charity programmes, being a trustee of the Sambodh Foundation, Bangalore. For further details, see www.consciousnessshop.com.

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I am honored to offer my whole hearted recommendation of Stuart Sovatsky’s new book, *Advanced Spiritual Intimacy: The yoga of deep tantric sensuality*, which serves as a scholarly, clinical and practical guide to identify and explore lifelong development in a new way. One does not have to be a scholar, clinician, or versed in yoga or tantric practice in any way to benefit from this practical application of ancient wisdom, which is clinically corroborated from Sovatsky’s lifetime of personal and professional application.

Sovatsky is a mentor within the community of humanity as well as within the professional world of Transpersonal Psychology. He lives his teachings, applying them to his own life as well as in his clinical and private practices. I first encountered Sovatsky by referral of a colleague as I was seeking guidance from a clinician versed in Spiritual Emergency. He expertly guided me in assisting a client toward relief from an emergence of spiritual development. Once framed in the context of “spiritual emergence” vs. “psychosis,” my client experienced relief from “symptoms” of what felt like panic, anxiety, grief, and depressive overwhelm.

Based on my own personal and professional experiences and observations with human potential and spiritual phenomena, I had long considered lifelong development (personal and transpersonal), breakthrough, and sustainable change as a possible human phenomenon beyond puberty; now, with Sovatsky’s expert manual my experiences are confirmed and my beliefs are validated.

In this book, Sovatsky’s practical understanding of Kundalini awakening as a natural and lifelong developmental process of awakenings via “pineal puberty” (Sovatsky’s term for “lifelong puberty of the spine.”) shines through as a triumph of understanding for the western mind, body, spirit, and soul. It makes sense, period. With each page, Sovatsky guides the reader through an understanding of ancient texts and meanings of tantric yoga practice all the while relating it to ordinary experience. You will find yourself relating to the ancient verses translated into modern language so that you discover you have experienced and are experiencing spiritual emergence within your very being in the present moment. In other words, spiritual awakening is arising or pressing to arise and awaken within you now. This guide actually helps you relax into acknowledging, receiving, and accepting such awakening. Beyond explanation of how and why it works, Sovatsky guides you through exercises to help you realize your fullest human potential and greatest possible happiness.

Read this, but more importantly use this text as a guide book for your own personal Self realization and actualization. It is a breakthrough in “technology” rooted in ancient wisdom that relates to all humanity, love, compassion, and empathy.

By following the practical exercises you will come to see your partner as part of the divinity that is in all things, and see your relationship as a sacred practice. It
nurtures relationships as well as develops a personal consciousness in relationships that benefits everyone in every area of life, within all relationships societally speaking because this approach changes your relationship to your Self and Source, whether you are currently in a relationship with another person or not.

One thing that comes through in this work for sure: Stuart Sovatsky is a living expression of love and compassion for all humanity. He holds an evolved understanding and expression of unconditional love. I have nothing but praise for this master work.

The Author
Stuart Sovatsky, Ph.D., degreed in Religion from Princeton and East-West Psychology from the California Institute of Integral Studies, a psychotherapist for forty-two years and co-president of the Association for Transpersonal Psychology, was first to bring yoga to incarcerated youth and the homeless mentally-ill in the 1970s. He is the author of Words from the Soul, Advanced Spiritual Intimacy, and “The History of Euro-Hinduism in America” in the (tabled) Columbia Desk Companion on Eastern Religions.

The Reviewer

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Stanislav Grof’s new book has been received with great interest, and as such we were delighted to offer not one, but two reviews of his book. We hope the readers of JTP will enjoy reading two different views of Dr. Grof’s new work.


The Human Struggle to Be Born - Perinatal Imagery in the Lifework of a Master

“I do not know anybody else who has so accurately portrayed the soul of modern humanity. A few decades from now when people talk about the twentieth century, they will think of Giger” (Grof, 2014, p. 17). This comment by legendary filmmaker Oliver Stone to consciousness researcher Stanislav
Grof, initially struck Grof as extreme. After some reflection, however, he began to see the truth in this perception. In his words:

No other artist has so powerfully captured the ills plaguing modern society – rampaging technology overshadowing human life, suicidal destruction of our planet’s environment, violence reaching apocalyptic proportions, sexual excesses, mass consumption of tranquilizers and narcotic drugs, and the underlying alienation individuals experience in relation to their bodies, each other, and nature. (p. 19)

Many will remember Giger as the designer of the alien in Ridley Scott’s classic sci-fi movie Alien, for which he was honored with an Oscar for Best Visual Effects in 1979. Giger’s art, both widely admired and controversial, is often characterized by a fusion of machinelike and human elements, an amalgam often referred to as “biomechanoid.” Head-crushing steel vices, compressing pistons, and mechanical cogwheels are featured abundantly in his paintings. On one level, these may be seen as reflecting the dangerous and oppressive intrusion of technology into human life. Grof writes:

The archetypal stories of Faust, the Sorcerer’s Apprentice, Golem, and Frankenstein have become the leading mythologies of our times. Materialistic science, in its effort to understand control the world of matter, has engendered a monster that threatens the very survival of life on our planet. The human role has changed from that of demiurge to that of victim. (p. 19)

It is interesting that this book’s publication, as well as Giger’s sudden death this spring, occurred in 2014, the centennial of the onset of World War I – the first mechanized war in which humanity’s faith in technology, science, and rationality was deeply shaken by the mass slaughter of tens of millions by machine guns, artillery, and poison gas.

Giger’s rich and intense paintings are also replete with demonic, sexual, scatological, and claustrophobic motifs as well as sexual organs and appendages, laboring naked women and stricken, aggressive fetuses. Grof’s hypothesis is that these combinations of themes in Giger’s work are, rather than a random juxtaposition of images such as those found in surrealism, reflections of a deep and consistent experiential logic which is meaningfully related to the psychological death-rebirth process. Giger’s art depicts the kinds of “dark night of the soul” experiences that routinely occur during the process of inner psychospiritual transformation. Individuals engaged in deep and systematic forms of self-exploration, such as psychedelic therapy or holotropic breathwork, encounter the same elements portrayed in Giger’s paintings at certain points in their inner journeys.

Grof termed this layer of the psyche perinatal (literally “surrounding birth”), a layer that has not yet been integrated in mainstream psychology, which tends to focus exclusively on postnatal events. Attempts to explain Giger’s work in terms of his post-natal biography, however, have been less than convincing. Giger enjoyed a relatively peaceful childhood free of major traumas, including
a warm and loving relationship with his mother and a satisfactory one with his father. Yet from an early age he displayed a highly engaged imagination and dream life, with both an attraction to and fear of passages, tunnels, trap doors and cellars – themes which could be logically related to the passage through the birth canal. Like many artists, Giger was deeply introspective and explicitly aware of the birth process as a powerful inspiration for his work. The cover image of this book, his “Homage to Samuel Beckett III” (1969), depicts an uncomfortable fetus in a narrow channel, squashed and pressed down by a hydraulic piston. Grof points out that the intensity of the contracting uterine walls, which press the frail head of the fetus down the narrow birth canal with 50 to 100 pounds of force, have for the fetus a relentlessly overpowering and machinelike quality.

His research further suggests that the perinatal layer of the psyche, so evocatively portrayed in Giger’s art, is responsible for many emotional and psychosomatic problems in human life. Grof writes:

Our self-definition and attitudes toward the world in our postnatal life are heavily contaminated by this constant reminder of the vulnerability, inadequacy, and weakness that we experienced at birth. In a sense, although we have been born anatomically, we have not caught up with this fact emotionally. (p. 97)

These leftover energies, however, do not create problems only for individuals. Consciousness research suggests that material from the dynamic stage of labor – with its intense driving forces, life-threatening suffocation, and activation of biological energies reaching an emotional and instinctual inferno – is a deep source of many extreme forms of collective psychopathology, including wars, bloody revolutions, concentration camps, genocide, and terrorism. Grof writes: “Convincing evidence indicates also that unresolved material from this birth matrix engenders and feeds the atrocities of such societal plagues as Nazism, Communism, and religious fundamentalism” (p. 153). The perinatal layer of the psyche, though still beyond the vision of traditional psychotherapy, however, is not the deepest realm that emerges in self-exploration. Grof coined the term “transpersonal” to describe experiences in which people gain access to ancestral and racial memories from Jung’s historical unconscious, to archetypal and mythological realms, an identification with specific animal or plant species, past-life experiences, or cosmic consciousness.

While unresolved perinatal and transpersonal material is responsible for many problems in the modern world, facing these leftovers in supported forms of self-exploration results in profound emotional and physical healing, creative breakthroughs, and spiritual awakening – transcendent experiences, which Giger was able to touch on in his most sublime creations. In a sense, he has given to the realm of art a portion of what Grof has contributed to Western psychology and psychiatry. Giger’s rich offerings, so gracefully interpreted by Grof, can be seen as alluring invitations to humanity for a deeper self-knowledge, calling us to face our disowned shadow material and, in doing so, reclaim the spiritual dimensions of existence. This foundational book, with
contributions by the two masters, is a must-read for all serious students of art and the creative process, depth psychology and psychopathology, history, self-exploration, spirituality, and transcendent states.

The Author
Stanislav Grof, M.D., Ph.D., is a psychiatrist with more than fifty years of experience researching the healing and transformative potential of non-ordinary states of consciousness. He is one of the founders and chief theoreticians of Transpersonal Psychology, and is currently a professor of psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, CA and at Wisdom University in Oakland, CA. Grof has published over 150 papers in professional journals and also many books including *Beyond the Brain, LSD Psychotherapy, Psychology of the Future, The Cosmic Game, When the Impossible Happens, and The Ultimate Journey*.

The Reviewer

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In this darkly enlightening book, Stanislav Grof reviews the work of the late artistic genius, H. R. Giger, who is best known for his contributions to the visual effects of the 1979 Hollywood blockbuster Alien. Grof analyzes the art of the shadowy visionary, casting light on the potential connections between the darker corners of our collective minds, our birth experiences, and our daily lives.

Giger’s art is known for its dark, often disturbing content, and much conjecture has been made as to the meaning of his macabre style. Giger’s art has been known to induce intense reactions in people, especially for those who prefer not to acknowledge their own capacity for darkness. As Grof (2014) reminds us, “It is certainly more comfortable to see Giger’s images as an expression of his personal depravation, perversion, or psychopathology, rather
than recognize elements that we all carry in the depths of our unconscious psyche” (p. 163). As a result, great controversy surrounded Giger’s art, and critics attacked his character, casting upon him “moral judgments and psychiatric labels questioning his integrity and sanity” (p. 161).

And then there were those who appreciated his work, who understood—or at least could find room in themselves—for both the light and the dark. Stanislav Grof, one of the founders and chief theoreticians of Transpersonal Psychology, is one of these people. Instead of seeing evidence of Giger’s own depravity, Grof unlocks the meaning of Giger’s gut-wrenching images of violence, suffering, sexuality, and the ‘biomechanoids’ that bring them all to life…and death.

The half-human, half-machine characters of Giger’s art exemplify the twisted interconnection of humankind and technology that arose in the twentieth century. Giger’s art wordlessly narrates the evident demise of the human race, depicting an important social commentary. As Grof (2014) says,

No other artist has so powerfully captured the ills plaguing modern society – rampaging technology overshadowing human life, suicidal destruction of our planet’s environment, violence reaching apocalyptic proportions, sexual excesses, mass consumption of tranquilizers and narcotic drugs, and the underlying alienation individuals experience in relation to their bodies, each other, and nature. (p. 19)

Grof connects the meaning of Giger’s art to the hellacious yet ecstatic experience of being born: a trauma which we all endure, and which, Grof believes, lays a foundation for much of our development in life. Grof’s ideas about childbirth are revolutionary because they imply a level of consciousness that is experienced by the fetus in utero.

Grof divides the birth experience into four parts, called Basic Perinatal Matrices (BPMs), with each BPM exhibiting its own unique characteristics and archetypes of the fundamental process that takes us from primal union with the mother (both human and cosmic), through the death-rebirth struggle, and finally, out into the terrifying world in our individuated form. The BPMs not only characterize the actual birth event, but also serve as metaphors for the myriad death-rebirth cycles we experience in our lives when an older version of ourselves—or that which we thought to be ourselves—dies. As Grof (2014) states:

The ego death that precedes rebirth is the death of our old concepts of who we are and what the world is like, forged by the traumatic imprint of birth and maintained by the memory of this situation that stays alive in our unconscious. What is actually dying in this process is the false ego that, up to this point in our life, we have mistaken for our true self. (p. 97)

To claim that birth leaves a “traumatic imprint” in our unconscious is an even more revolutionary idea, and one that Giger seemed to touch on intuitively,
and to impress upon his artwork. The paradoxical pairings of good and bad, human and machine, pain and sexuality that define Giger’s art inimitably reflect the archetypes of Grof’s BPMs. Giger, too, could see the importance of our perinatal experiences (both before and during our birth) on psychological patterns we later create in life, often applying these concepts to his own personal life.

Giger’s work is said to give “simultaneously a telescopic and microscopic revelation of the human psyche’s dark secrets,” (Grof, 2014, p. 41) shining light on the microscopic moment of an individual’s birth, while also reconnecting us all to the deep abyss of the human unconscious…including those aspects deemed most dreadful.

Giger draws that which is most taboo, showing us what we dare not see in ourselves, and yet, that which excites and entertains us so fiendishly when not seen as our own darkness. Grof remarks on the utter fascination modern culture seems to have with death, destruction, and sexuality—the likes of which are deeply repressed in our own individual psyches. The analytical psychologist, C. G. Jung, emphasized the importance of integrating these darker aspects (which he called the shadow) into our consciousness, lest they wreak havoc on our lives for being ignored.

Giger’s art places us face-to-face with images so evocative that it is hard for us to hide from the darkness within ourselves, and Grof elucidates the meaning of these images reminding us that we have no reason to hide. Instead, we have every reason to bring our darkness to light, to reconnect to that which makes us most human, and to bring ourselves—and our society—closer to wholeness.

Grof guides the reader through Giger’s art, giving voice to the uncomfortable feelings that are too often silenced in our society, and provides an understanding of the poignant connection between suffering and ecstasy, pain and arousal, death and birth. Together, Grof’s words and Giger’s art conceive an image of the human experience in its entirety, impeccable in its wholeness and modest in its brazen honesty, which is certain to leave the reader with a more integrated relationship with one’s depths.

The Author

Stanislav Grof, M.D., Ph.D., is a psychiatrist with more than fifty years of experience researching the healing and transformative potential of non-ordinary states of consciousness. He is one of the founders and chief theoreticians of Transpersonal Psychology, and is currently a professor of psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, CA and at Wisdom University in Oakland, CA. Grof has published over 150 papers in professional journals and also many books including Beyond the Brain, LSD Psychotherapy, Psychology of the Future, The Cosmic Game, When the Impossible Happens, and The Ultimate Journey.
The Reviewer

*Valerie Beltran* is a graduate student at John F. Kennedy University, studying Integral Psychotherapy and working towards becoming a dual Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist and Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor. She is the Managing Editor for the *Journal of Holistic Psychology*, and an Editorial Assistant for the *Journal of Transpersonal Research*. 
BOOKS OUR EDITORS ARE READING

Friedman, Miriam (2015). *Love is always the answer: My survival through the Holocaust and spiritual journey with Mrs. Irina Tweedie*. Nevada City, CA: Blue Dolphin.

An inside look into the teachings of the Sufi path, including dream interpretation, and the sayings of the Sufi teacher, Mrs. Irina Tweedie (cf. *Daughter of Fire*).

Gruning, Herb (2014). *Who do we think we are: What it takes to be human*. Nevada City, CA: Blue Dolphin.

This publication is an attempt to answer the question: Just what is our human “nature”?


A synthesis of world-wide teachings and practices to awaken and illumine our human consciousness.

... Paul Clemens


A serious and thoughtful Buddhist version. Surprising.


... James Fadiman


... Jorge Ferrer


... Stanley Krippner

The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, 2014, Vol. 46, No. 2 271


Includes fascinating essays: “Time and energy,” “Metalanguages of the transpersonal,” “Pythagorean cosmos,” and many others. This is the last book of the most original Russian organologist and thinker (1937–2011). Felix was most known for his musical activities: He reconstructed ancient and invented new musical instruments and created a new theory of musical syntax.


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Kaisa Puhakka

To˜nu Soidla
Fascinating discussion of how insight meditation, which had largely died out in much of Buddhism, was reintroduced, and partly as a way of slowing the British invasion of Burma! The history gets much deeper than that, though, for it shows how it was not a “neutral” meditation procedure, vipassana, that was introduced so much as it was intertwined with memorized knowledge of Buddhist scriptures, so that meditation experiences were likely to confirm accepted Buddhist ideas, rather than simply openly explore the mind. 

... Charles Tart


... Frances Vaughan


... Miles Vich