

Participatory Spirituality:

“A psyche the size of the Earth”



Glen Coe – Richard
Holrody

Mike Wilson 2015

Three inter-related areas

Participatory spirituality

Ecopsychology

Consciousness

Three Sisters, Glencoe



What is a participatory spirituality?

Disciplinary model, theoretical orientation/perspective, or paradigm in transpersonal psychology which focuses on embodied, relational, pluralistic dimensions of transpersonal “events”



Beech Wood, Arbroath, Scotland

Dimensions of being human

Spiritual participatory “events” can engage the entire range of *human dimensions*, e.g., rational/mental, imaginal, somatic, instinctual, emotional, vital/energetic, behavioural, and so on

Events as encounters; experiences and/or insights arising out of encounters with (between) the other (person, presence, animal, habitat) are “cocreative events”

Spiritual knowing

“the *participatory approach* holds that human spirituality or spiritual knowing emerges from our cocreative participation in a dynamic and undetermined mystery or generative power of life, the cosmos, and/or the spirit” (Ferrer, 2011: 2)

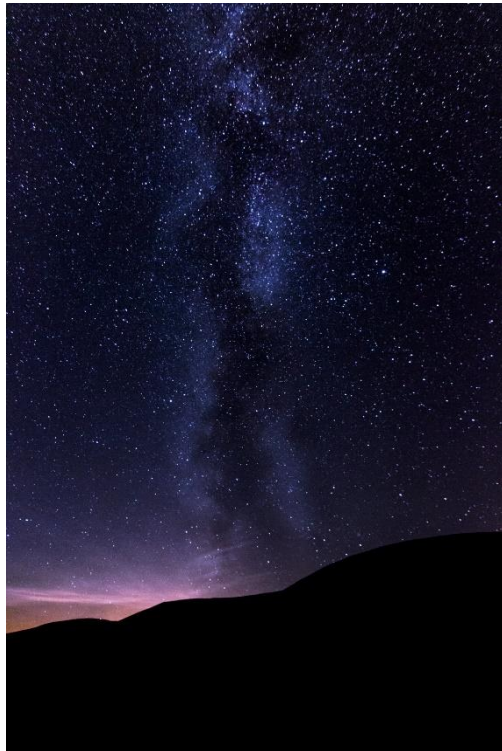
Dimensions of Participatory Spirituality

Spiritual cocreation:

- a. **intrapersonal cocreation** (embodied, the spirit within), e.g., liminal space within, dreams/deep imagination/wild within.
- b. **interpersonal cocreation** (relational, the spirit between), e.g., in-between, deep, intimate, respectful, subject-to-subject, bonds.
- c. **transpersonal cocreation** (enactive, the spirit beyond):
“transcendent dimension of mystery” (rather: mystery is through and through everything)

Participatory spirituality as creative spirituality:

“Openness to the novelty and creativity of nature of spirit”
(Ferrer, 2011: 4-5)



Paying attention, being open, receptive, and surrendering to nature (e.g., tree, mountain, habitat, badger, sunset, stars, mystery), sometimes purposefully (Wilson, 2012).

Northumberland National Park

Spiritual individuation: Creativity is the pathway through “which a person gradually develops and embodies his or her unique identity and wholeness” towards a community of uniquely “spiritually differentiated individuals”, who are “*embodied, integrated, connected, and permeable*” in their identity, and whose high degree of differentiation, far from being isolating, actually allows him/her to enter into a *deeply conscious communion with others, nature, and the multidimensional cosmos*” (Ferrer, 2011: 5)



Stonehenge, John Piper

Participatory pluralism: Embraces the multiplicity of “spiritual paths”, “spiritual liberations”, “spiritual ultimates” beyond traditional states of enlightenment or liberation. “[S]piritual ultimates can be enacted through intentional or spontaneous participation in a dynamic and undetermined mystery, spiritual power, and/or generative force of life or reality” (Ferrer, 2011: 5-6).

Indefinite number of ultimate self-disclosures of reality

Limitless openness to wild
without/wild within



Chalk Paths, Ravilious

Relaxed spiritual universalism:



“[t]he participatory approach affirms an underlying undetermined mystery or creative spiritual power as the generative source of all spiritual enactions.”

“[t]he mystery cocreatively unfolds in multiple ontological directions”.

One and the Many



Participatory Epistemology and Critical Theory:

The participatory turn emphasises the importance of overcoming narcissism and self-centeredness.

The egocentrism test, which assesses the extent to which spiritual traditions, teachings, and practices free practitioners from gross and subtle forms of narcissism and self-centredness; and the dissociation test, which evaluates the extent to which the same foster the integrated blossoming of all dimension of the person.” These lead to a socially lead to “*integrated selflessness*”.

The eco-social-political test, which assesses the extent to which spiritual systems foster ecological balance, social and economic justice, religious and political freedom, class and gender equality, and other fundamental human rights (emphasis original Ferrer, 2011: 7), as well as supports rights of non-human life forms and their supportive environments.

Integral Bodhisattvas:



“[P]articipatory spirituality seeks to foster the harmonious engagement of all human attributes in the spiritual path without tensions or dissociations”, e.g., engage body, vital energy, heart, mind, consciousness in the enactment of spiritual phenomena.

Freedom from alienating tendencies that prevent participation in the “unfolding of the mystery” (Ferrer, 2011: 8-9).

Self-realisation of all beings as well as the universe itself.

Participatory Spiritual Practice:

“[p]articipatory spiritual practice cultivates the embodied, relational, and enactive dimensions of spiritual cocreation” (Ferrer, 2011: 9).



Participatory spirituality in ecopsychological perspective



Ecopsychology: Definitions

‘Ecopsychology is an effort to understand, heal, and develop the psychological dimensions of the human-nature relationship (psychological, bio-social-spiritual) through connecting and reconnecting with natural processes in the web of life. At its core, ecopsychology suggests that there is a synergistic relation between planetary and personal well being; that the needs of the one are relevant to the other’.

EcRobert Greenway, Amy Lenzo, Gene Dilworth, Robert Worcester, and Linda Buzzell-Saltzman

Ecopsychology is a psychological undertaking that essentially says ‘we too are part of nature’.

Andy Fisher



Beech coppice, Scottish Borders

Participation, experience, consciousness

Embodied felt sense experience in
relationship with the community of nature,
and the:

expansion of experience

widening of consciousness



We become most fully ourselves through an *expansion of experience*, and a *widening of consciousness* in relation to nature (out there) as well as in relation to dreams and the deep imagination (nature within).



Suggest that *expansion of experience* and *widening of consciousness* is a *consequence* of or arises out of our intimate connections with the feeling earth, and the species and ecosystems of the feeling earth.



Glencoe, Scotland

‘Our animal senses are our access to the cosmos.
Bodily perception provides our most intimate entry
into a primary order of reality that can be disparaged
or dismissed only at our peril’.

David Abram *Becoming Animal*



The body needs and uses our
senses to complete its
realisation.

Michael David Levin *The Body's
Recollection of Being.*



Nr. Coldstream, Scottish Borders

‘The sensing body is like an open circuit that completes itself only in things, in others, in the surrounding earth’.

David Abram *Becoming Animal*.



Fields nr. Wooler, Northumberland

‘The earth is the source of our individuation since it [allows us to] stand becoming ourselves [through] the wisdom in our bodily [felt] experience’.

Michael David Levin *The Body's Recollection of Being*.



College Valley, Northumberland

Downward focus of development that paradoxically leads to an upward, extended, surge of growth.

Inscendence (Thomas Berry)

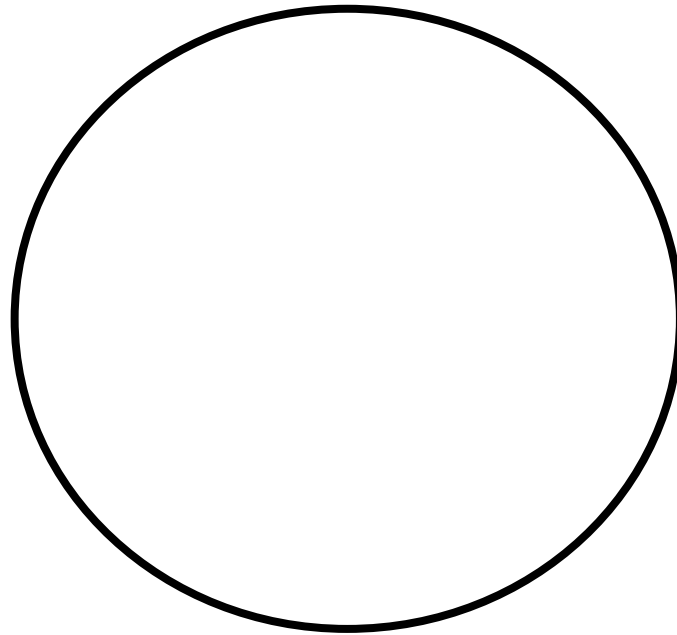


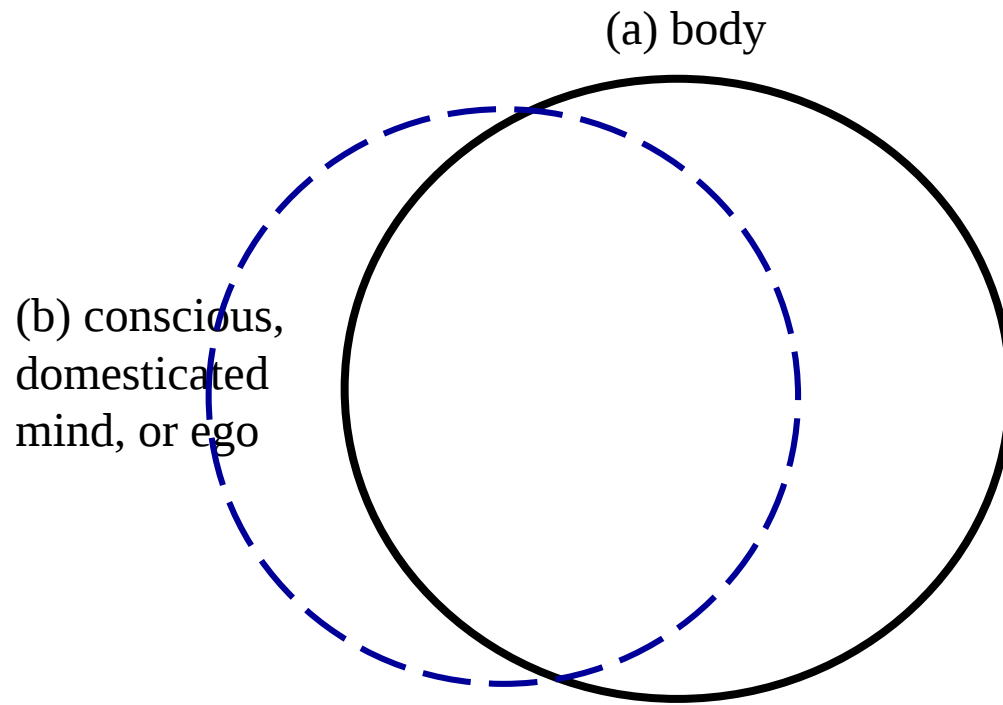
Consciousness

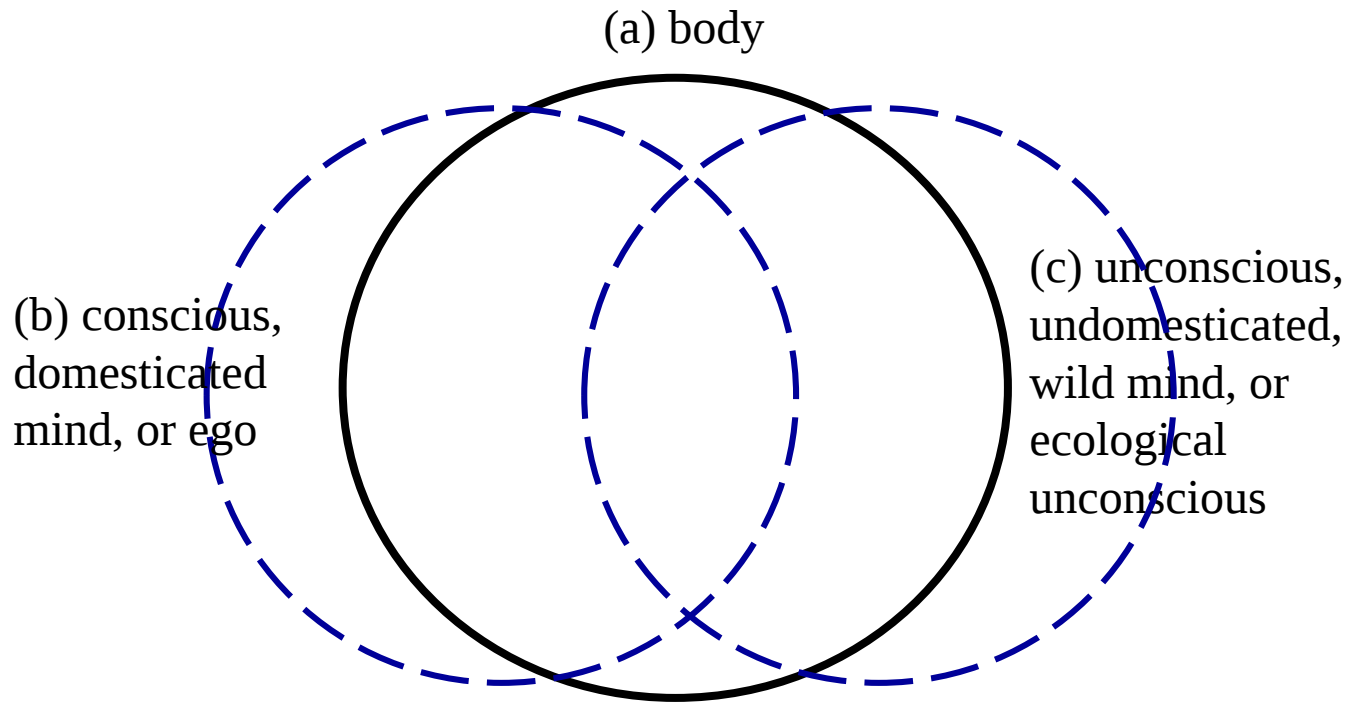


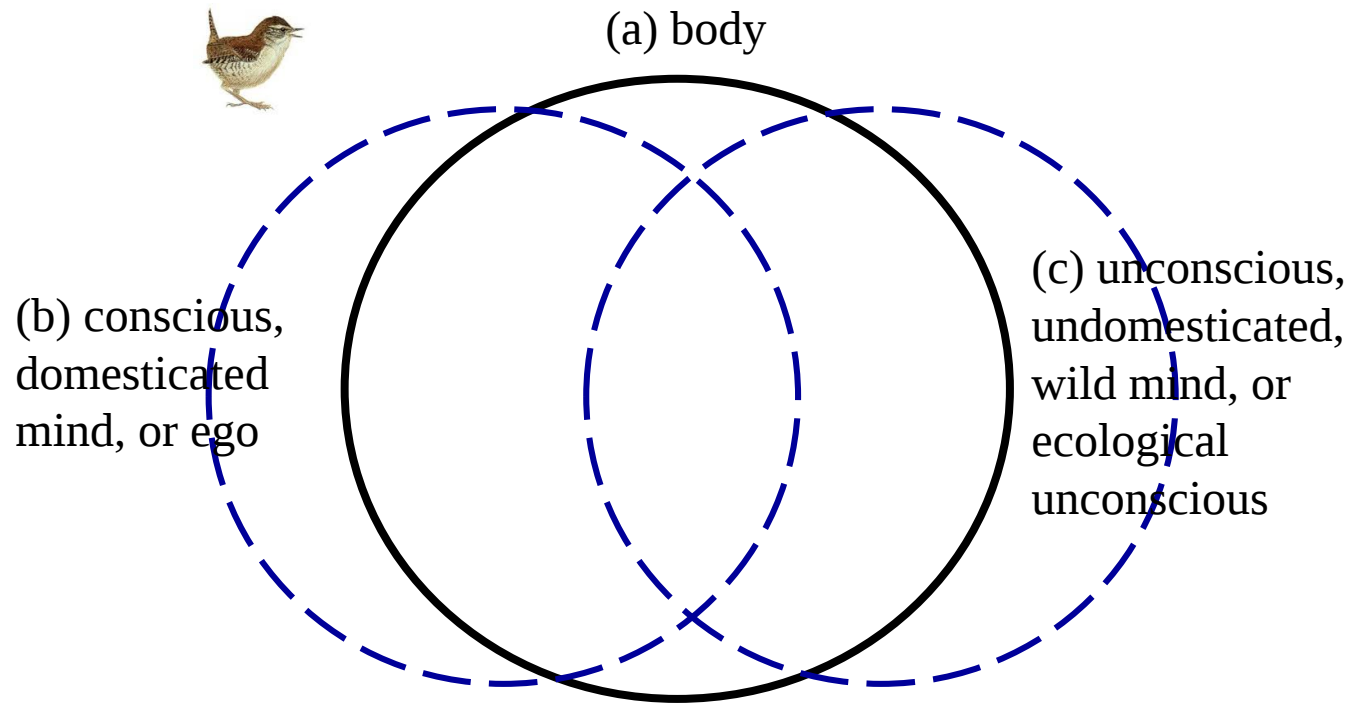
What does this look like?

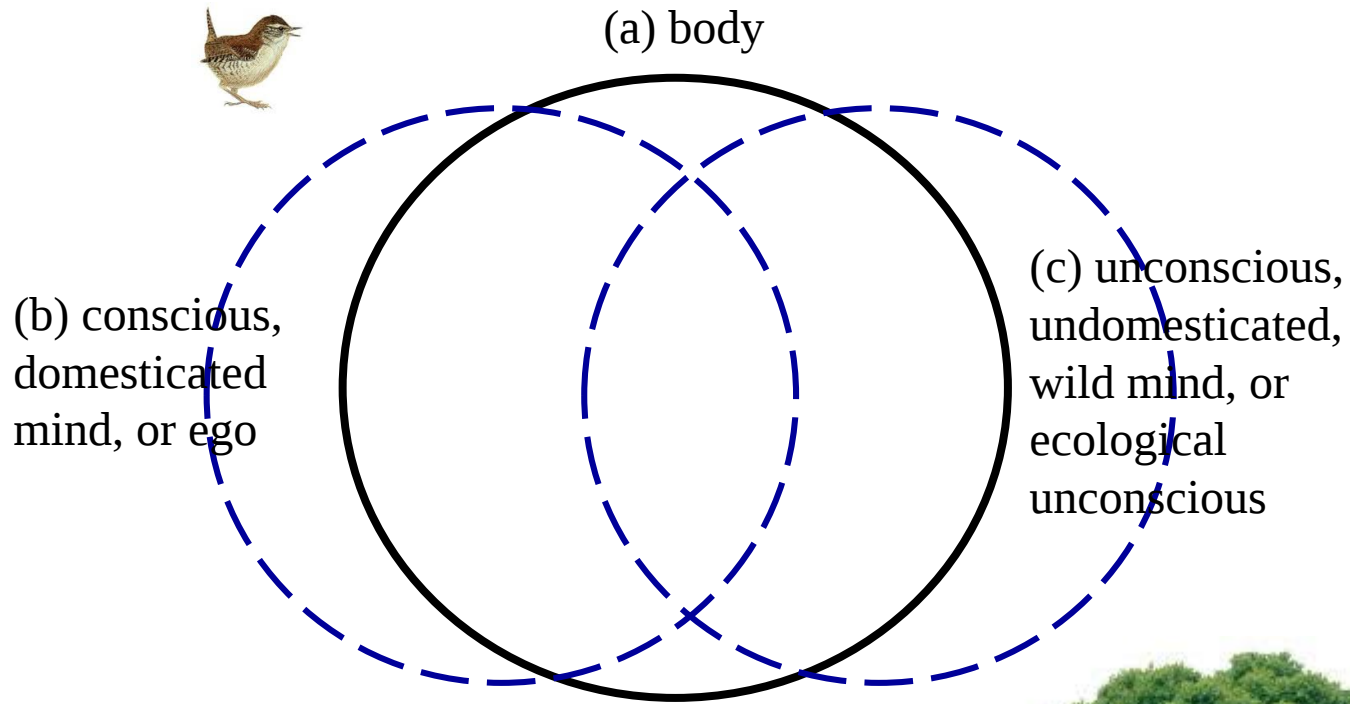
(a) body











(a) body

(b) conscious,
domesticated
mind, or ego

(c) unconscious,
undomesticated,
wild mind, or
ecological
unconscious



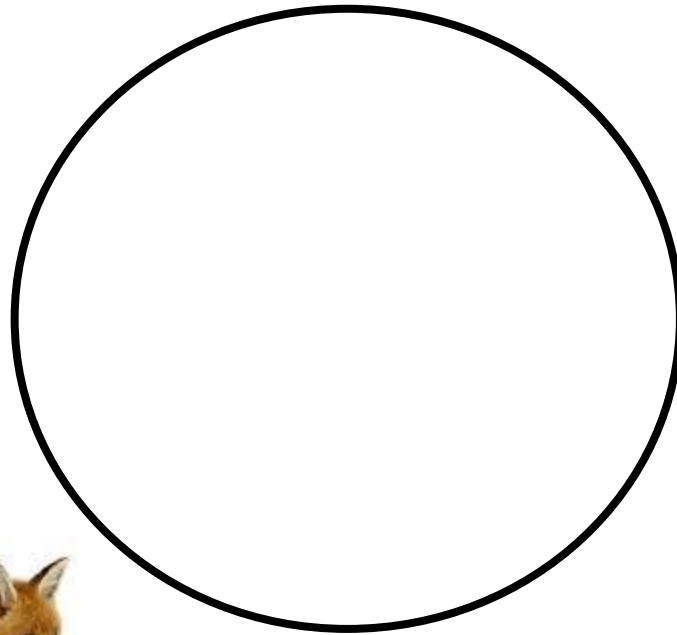
(a) body

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(a) body



Within the participatory perspective ecopsychology is an *embodied*, felt-sense, relational practice. This means that it engages the whole person (e.g., feelings, senses, body, spirituality) and not just the mind.





We might say that the embodied felt-sense encounter with, say a fox, tree, mountain, river, or the moon brings about an experience which is co-created by both me and the fox.

This means that it is not me who creates the experience, but that the experience arises out of my encounter with the fox. *The experience arises out of the space in-between.*

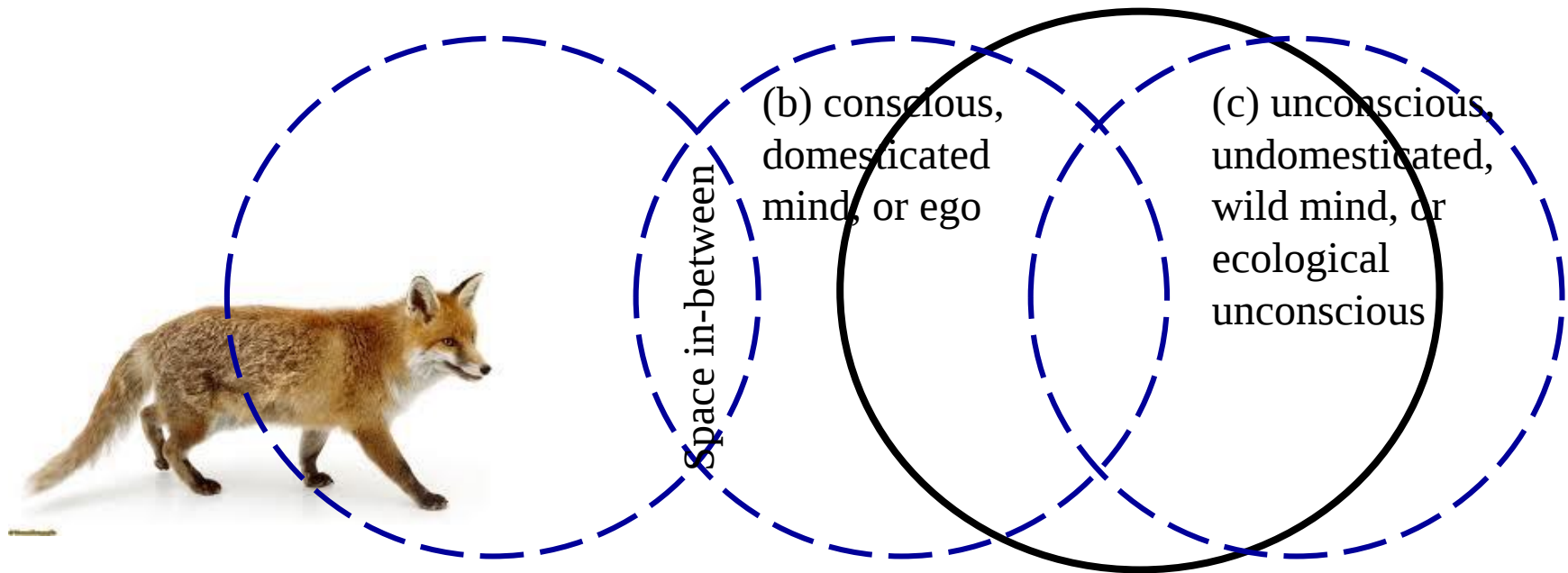


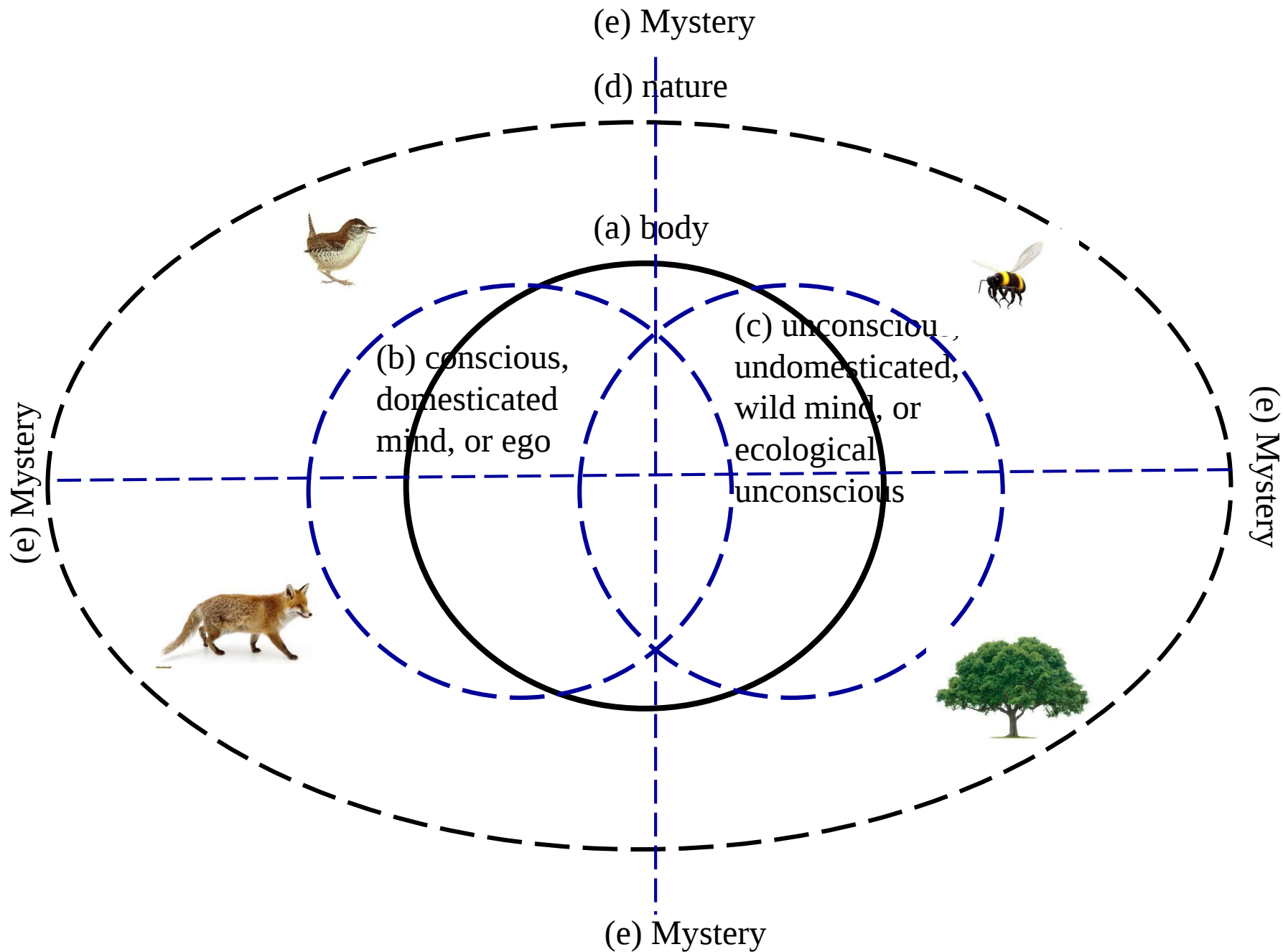
The experience is an *event* arising out of an encounter.
In this sense encounters in and with nature are co-created participatory events.

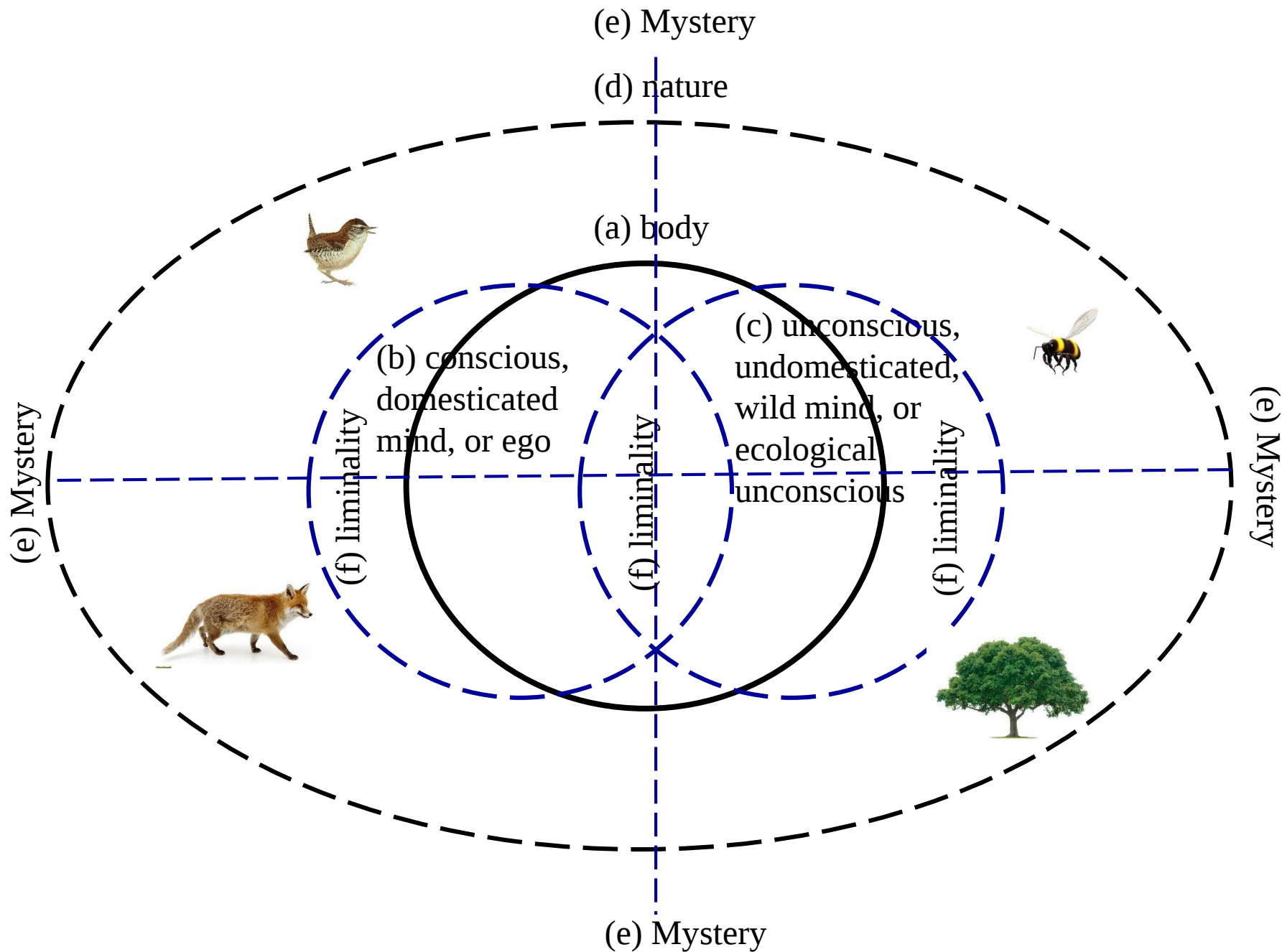
The space in-between or liminal space or margins.

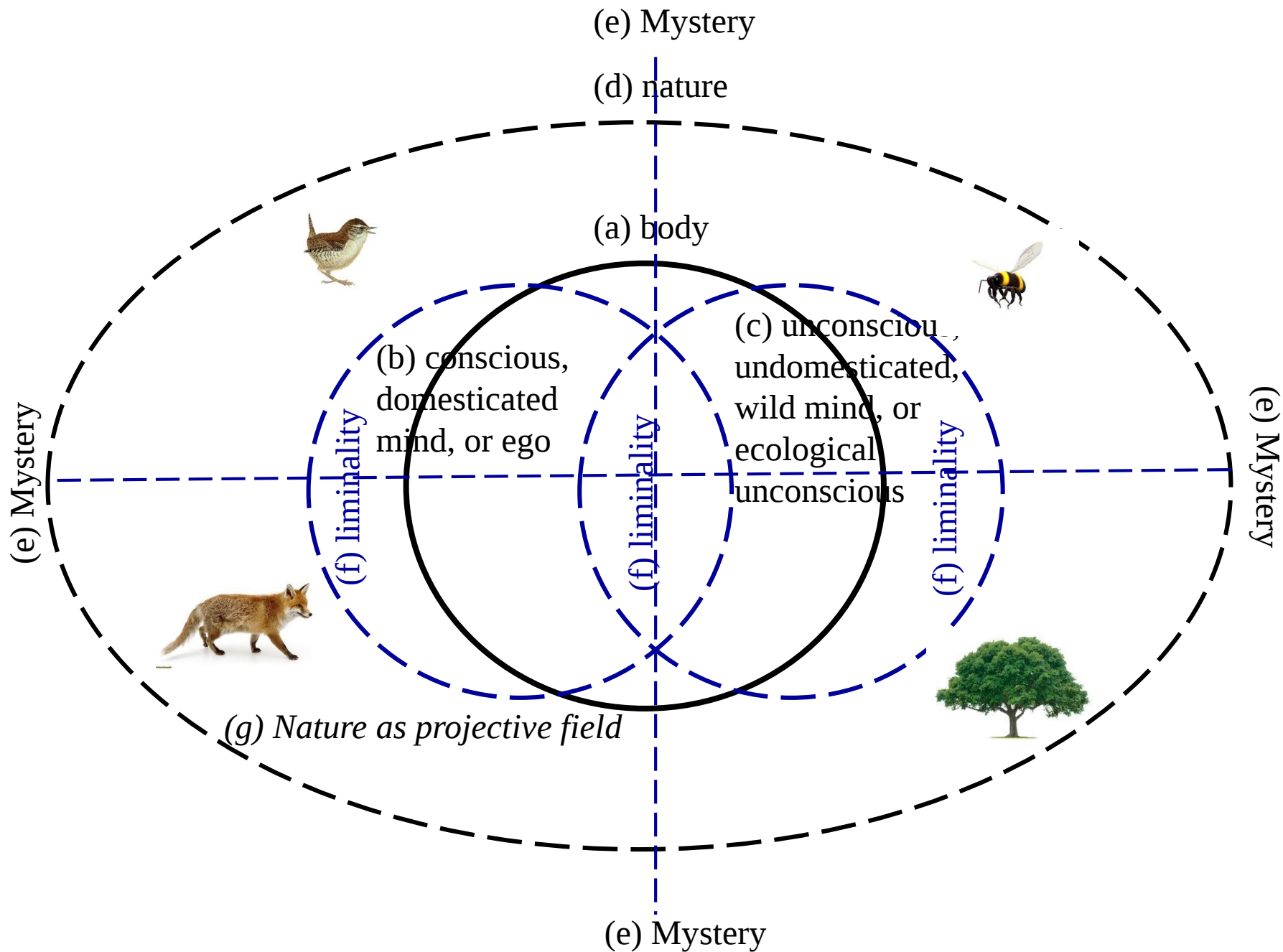
Such encounters might be thought of as “soul-encounters”. That is, the experience of “soul” arises out of a participatory event.

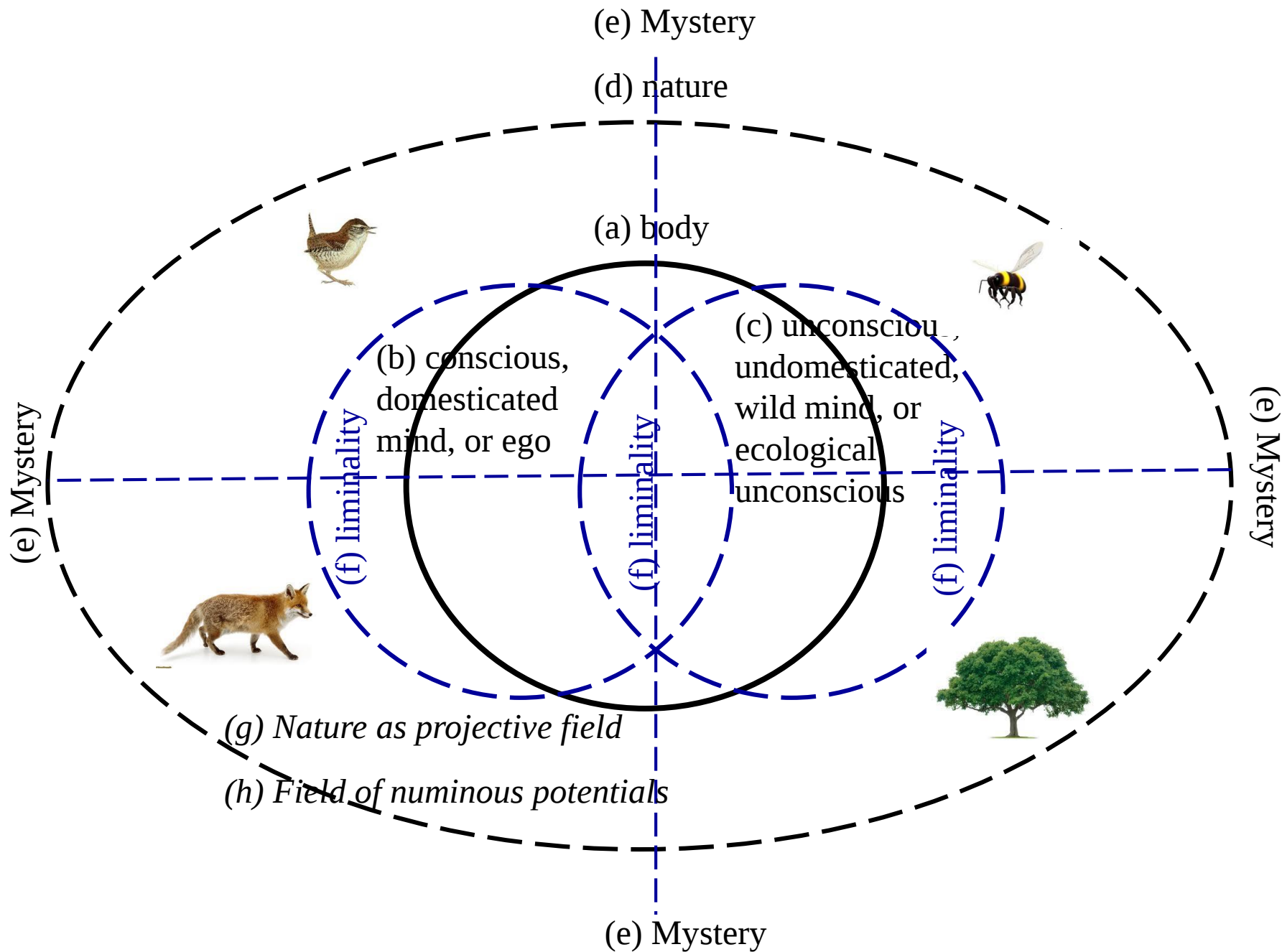
Perhaps the fox is also affected by the encounter.











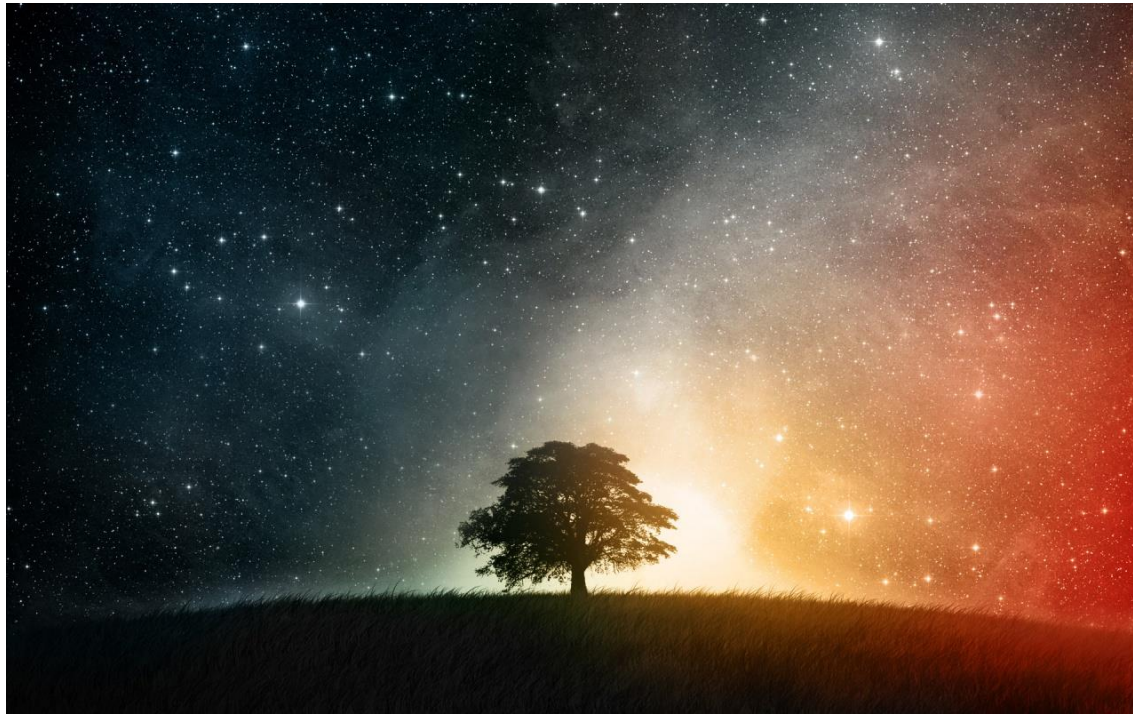
Our transformation requires that we allow for the transformation of other beings, who are also in the process of becoming.



The dormouse is an endangered species

‘Everything in the universe is genetically cousin to everything else. There is literally one family, one bonding, in the universe, because everything is descended from the same source’.

Thomas Berry



This ‘enigmatic and encompassing field of relationships’ is something ‘to which we can only apprentice ourselves’. We can only *begin* to participate in this wondrous field of relationships. It is ‘[O]nly by turning our bodily attention toward *another* that we experience the convergence and reassembly of our separate senses into a dynamic unity. Only by entering into relation with other do we effect our own integration and coherence’.

David Abram *Becoming Animal*



Becoming ourselves ‘requires – is – an act of faith, a “passion” of trust which entrusts our existence, to the support of the grounding earth’.

Michael David Levin *The Body’s Recollection of Being*.



Loch Vaa in the Cairngorm National Park, Scotland

Carl Jung: *We go in to connect*

Freya Mathews: *we go out to connect.*

John Muir: *for going out I found that I was really going in*



Loch Garten in the
Cairngorm National
Park, Scotland



Linhope Spout, Northumberland



Mire Loch, St. Abbs, Scottish Borders

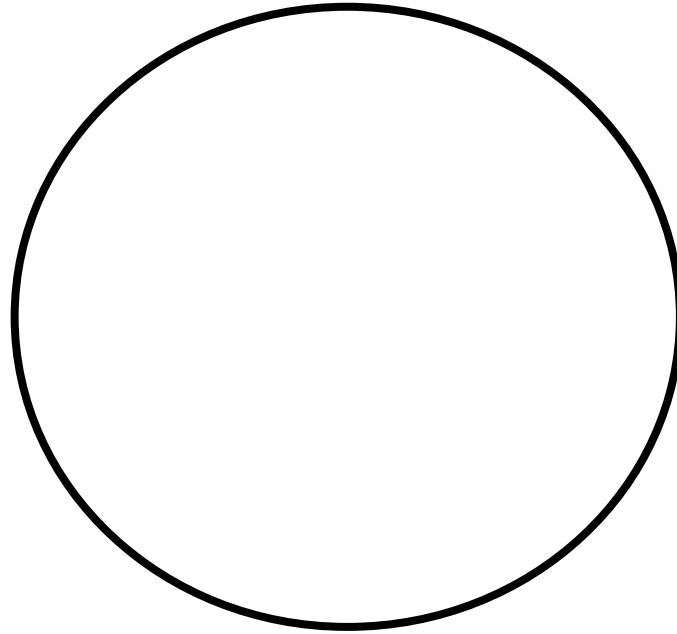
‘All things in the universe, in their subjectivity, are pervaded by inherent tendencies toward fulfilment of their potential’.

Thomas Berry

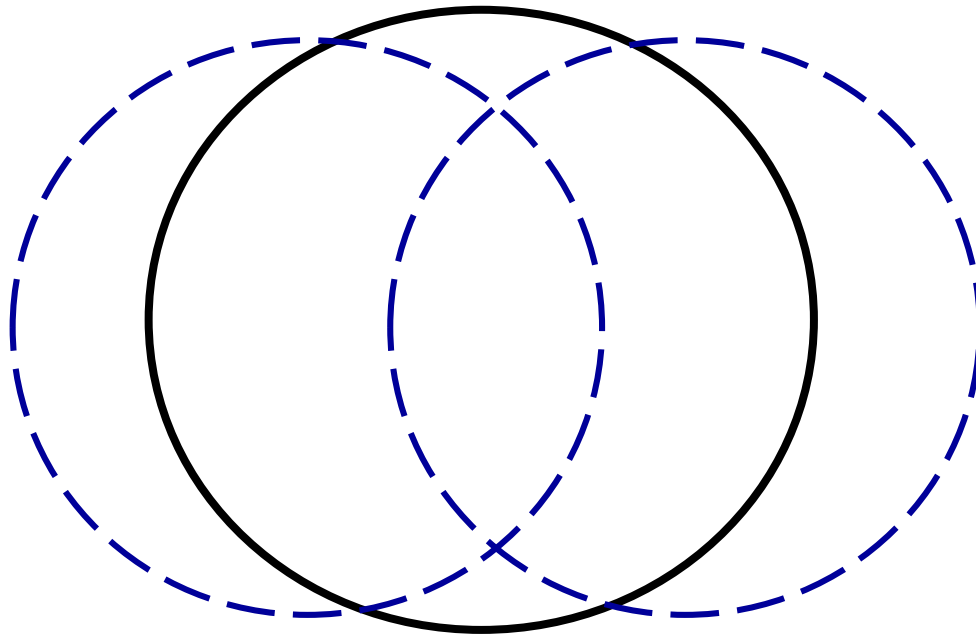


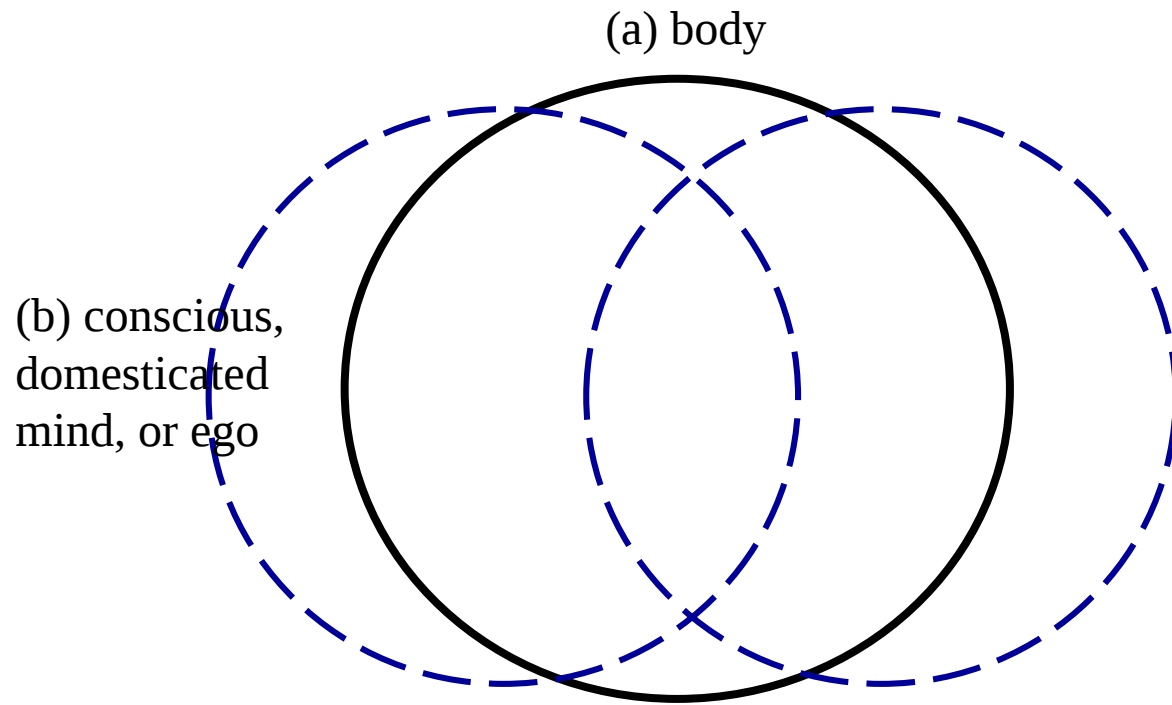
Participatory consciousness...again

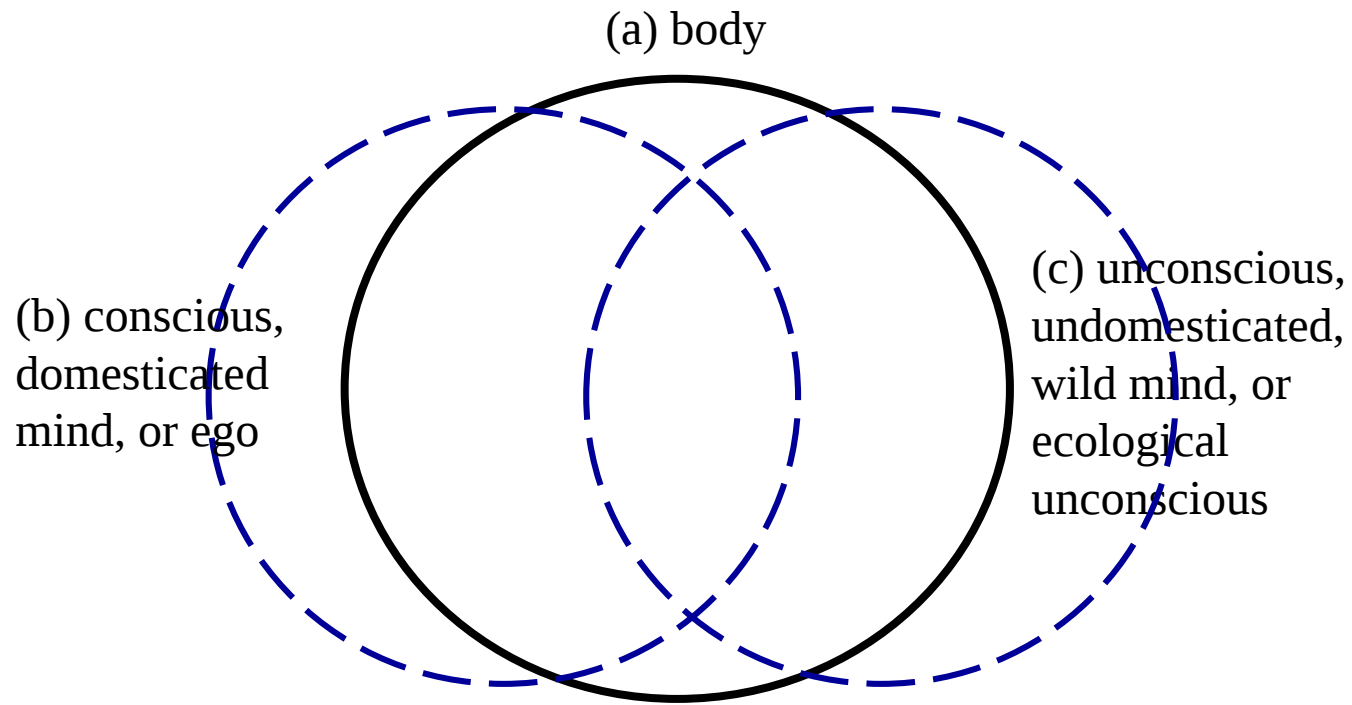
(a) body

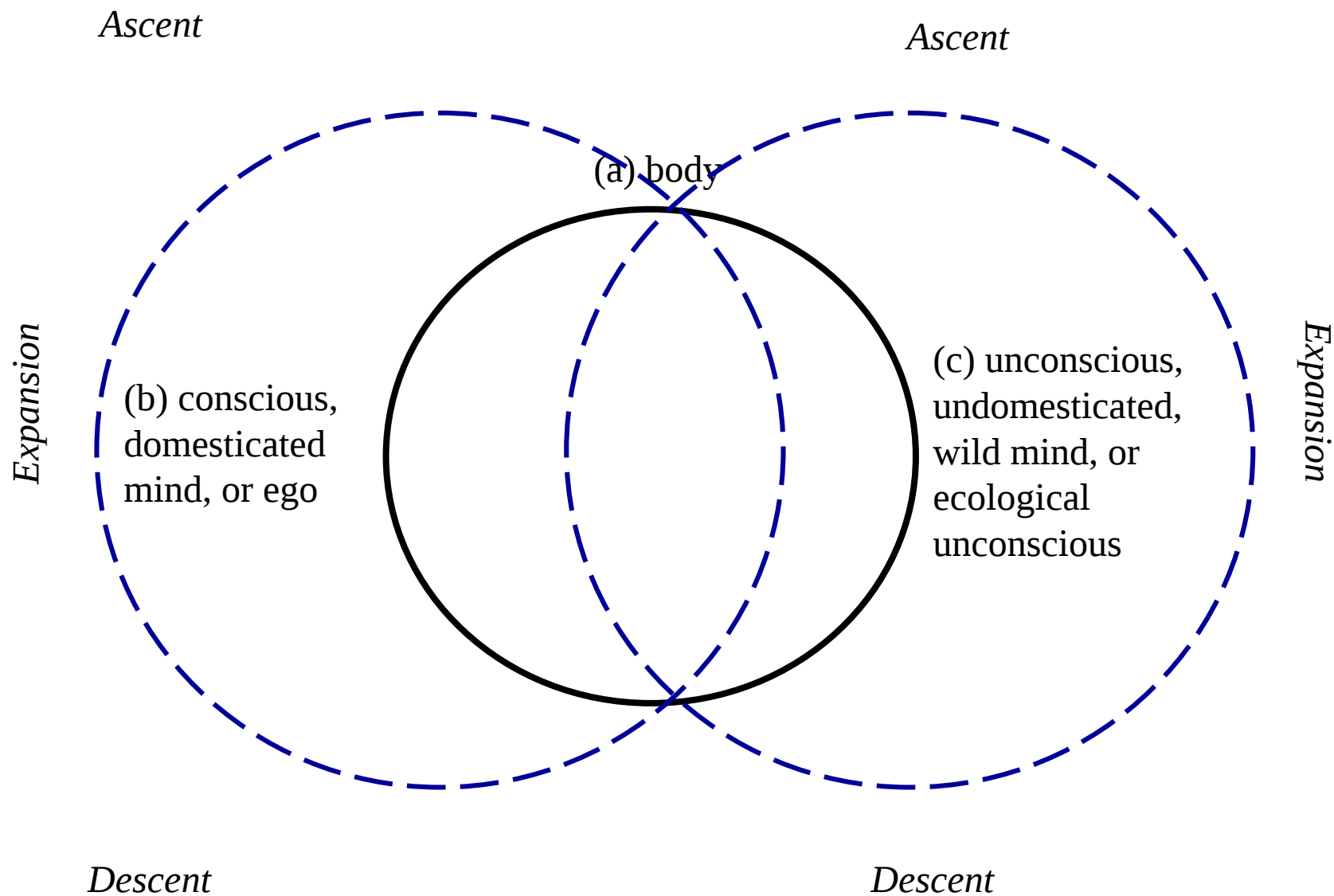


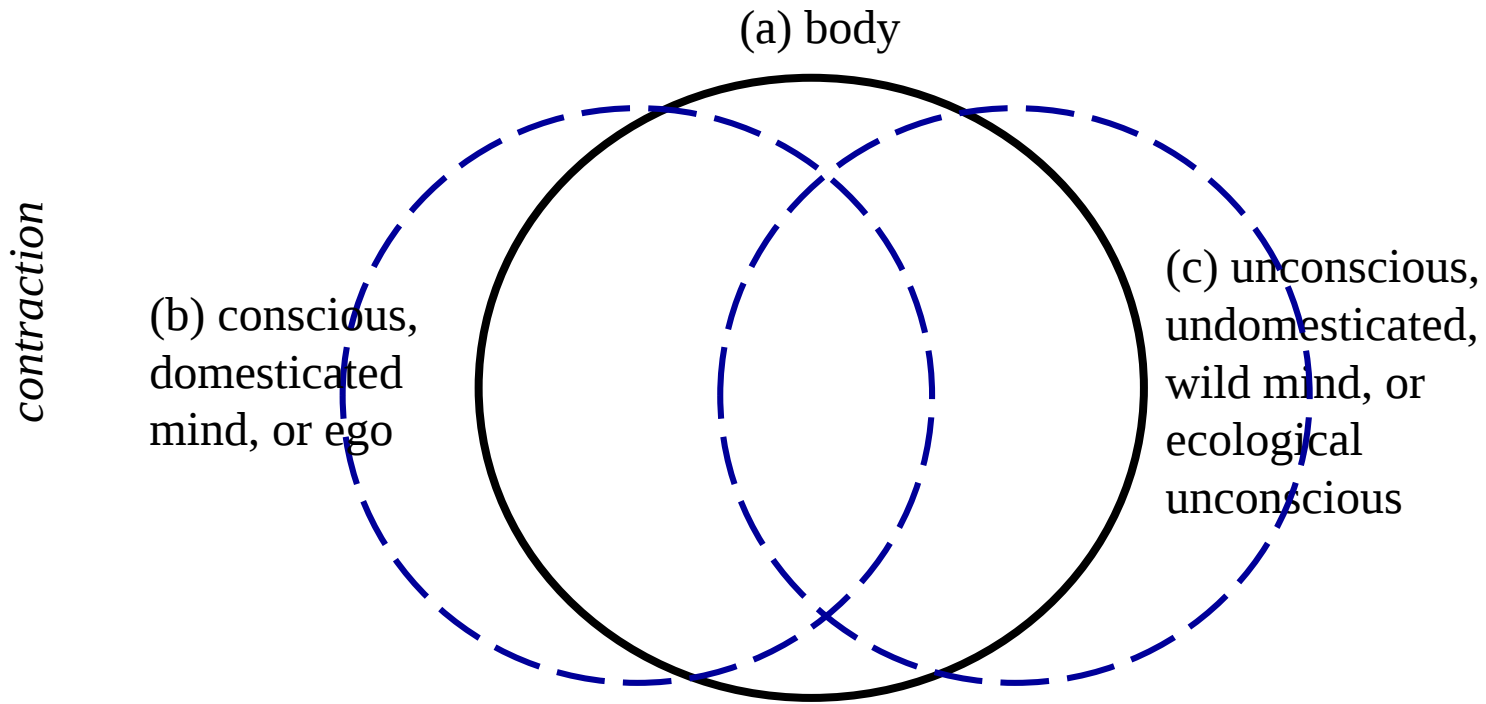
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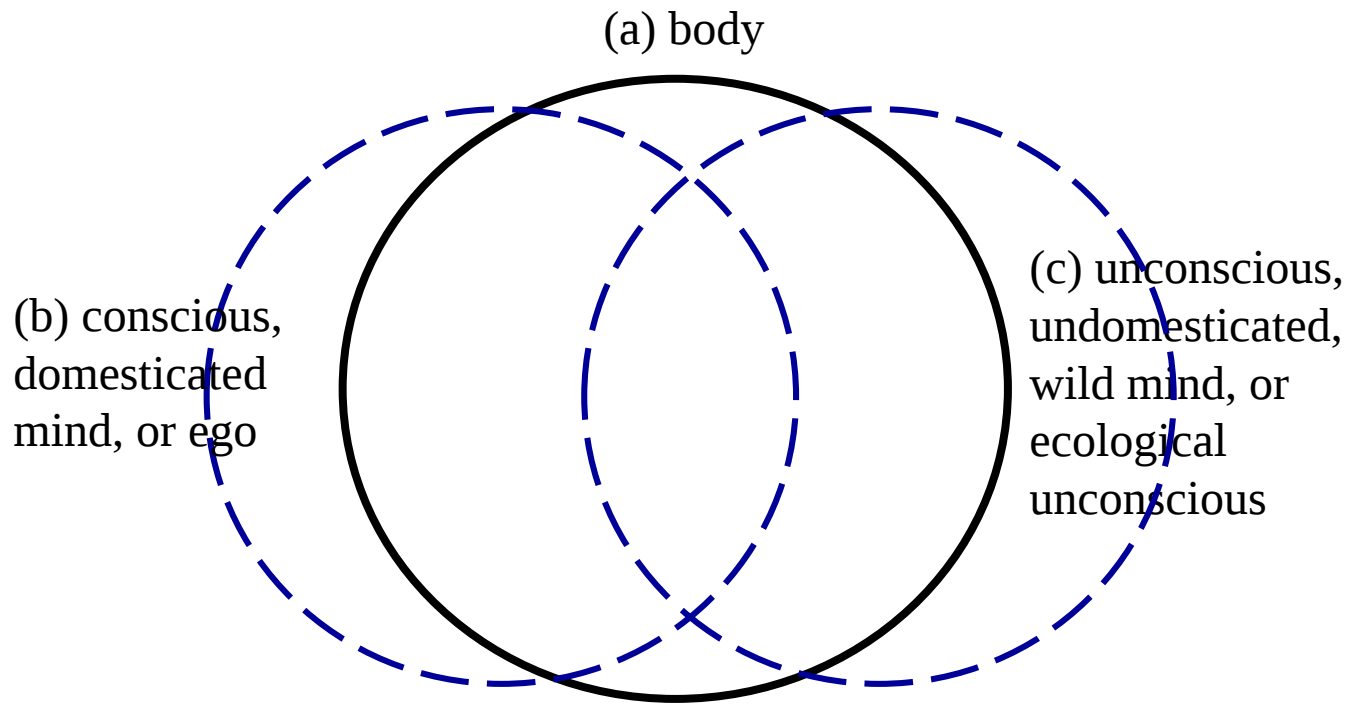






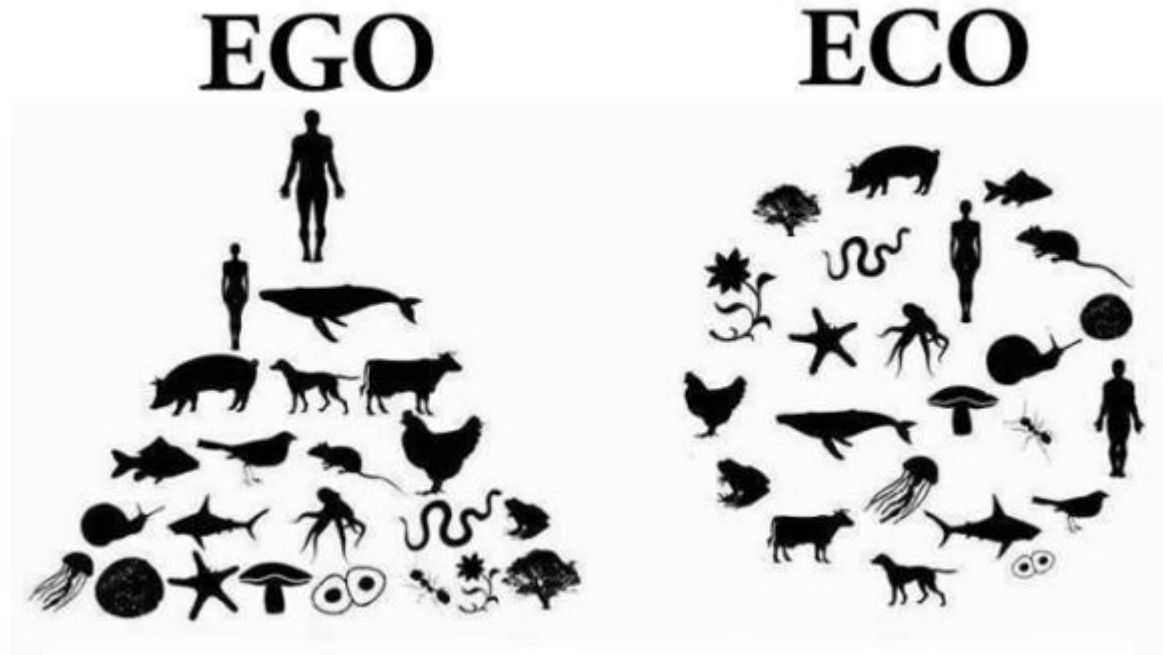






Ego is typically a closed system, and often contracted

From dominance to participation

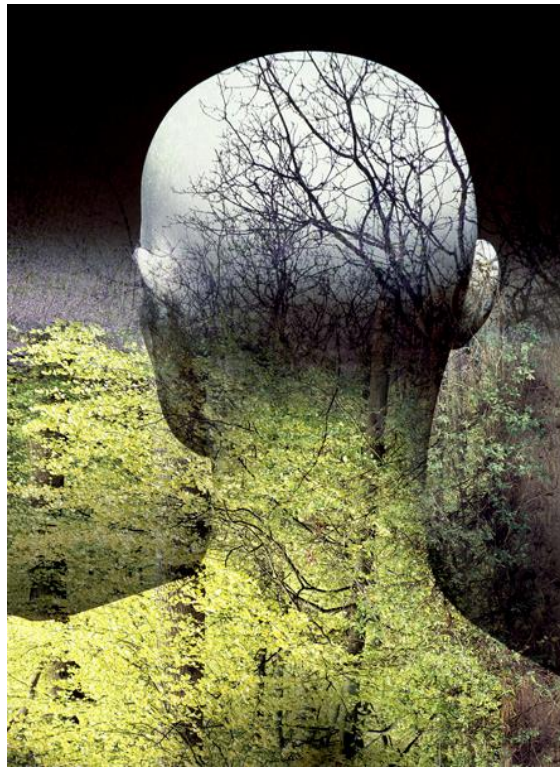


Identity

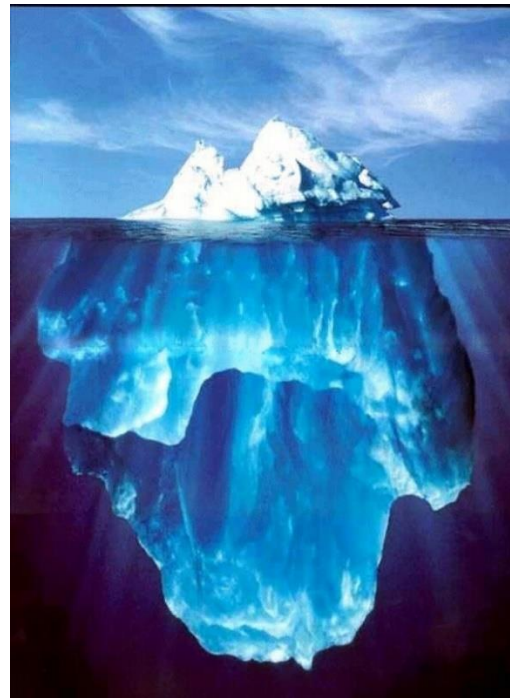
The widening capacity of the mind means that our identity takes in our surroundings. That is our identity is wrapped up in our relationship with geography, with our environment, with our intimate relationship with everything which inhabits “this place”. Our surroundings form part of our identity (while also being respectful of the difference of another subject). In essence, our identity potentially takes in or includes the farthest point of our embodied felt experience.



“My identity includes my deep relationship with the rest of nature of ‘whom’ I am a part”



“My identity is more than what is on the surface”



Also, what if...



...I was part of a psyche at least
the size of the earth?



The more expanded my experience, the more prone I become to experiencing a widening of consciousness or a *wilding* of consciousness. And with it a widening or *wilding* of identity, even if momentarily so.



But then...



Extinction of species is also the extinction of experience





The large
blue
butterfly



“One species becomes extinct in
England every fortnight” – *The
Telegraph*, 2010.





River Dart, Devon



I think the one overwhelming emotion that we had was when we saw the earth rising in the distance over the lunar landscape It makes us realize that we all do exist on one small globe. For from 230,000 miles away it really is a small planet.

— *Frank Borman, Apollo 8, press reports, 10 January 1969.*

My view of our planet was a glimpse of divinity.

— *Edgar Mitchel, Apollo 14 astronaut, 1971*



Suddenly from behind the rim of the moon, in long, slow-motion moments of immense majesty, there emerges a sparkling blue and white jewel, a light, delicate sky-blue sphere laced with slow swirling veils of white, rising gradually like a small pearl in a thick sea of black mystery. It takes more than a moment to fully realize this is Earth—home.”

Edgar Mitchel, Apollo 14 astronaut, 1971

References

Ferrer, J. N. (2011). Participatory spirituality and transpersonal theory: A ten-year retrospective. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 43 (1), 1-35.

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Wilson, M. (2011). Encounters with nature as a path of self-realisation: A meaning-making framework. *Journal of Transpersonal Research*, 3 (1), 11-29.