

An Environmental and Eco-Psychological Perspective on the Creative Function, in Response to Shaun McNiff's *Ch'i and Artistic Expression*

创造性功能的环境和生态心理观点，回应Shaun McNiff的文章《“气”和艺术性表达》

Alexander Kopytin

St. Petersburg Academy of Post-Graduate Pedagogical Training and
North-West Medical Academy, Russia

My concern for the environmental and ecological dimensions of the arts in the recent years has led me to accept a more universal and all-embracing idea of creativity as a form of human co-creation with nature. In his article, Shaun McNiff presents a view of creative action that I find very congruent with the environmental and ecological perspective.

Ecological expressive therapies (Kopytin and Rugh, 2016) along with other scientific disciplines and therapeutic approaches related to concepts of ecology and the environment, such as environmental psychology, ecopsychology, ecotherapy, “deep ecology” and ecohealth, etc. (Buzzell and Chalquist, 2009; De Young, 2013; Roszak, 1992), reflect the increasing preoccupation of many people with reestablishing positive, sustainable ways of relating to nature and addressing negative changes in the biosphere resulting from human activity. These approaches encourage a shift in our orientation to the meaning and function of human relations to nature as a vital factor in health. They strive to embrace a wider scope of ideas and instruments related to diverse cultural backgrounds and professional specializations which provide multi-professional and multi-modal integration and dialogue necessary to strengthen the ecological, nature-assisted expressive therapy position.

In recent years, new ideas have emerged about the role of the arts and the creative function of the psyche that are more congruent with ecology and environmentally-oriented movements in psychology and therapy. Some of them strive to integrate world traditions with their wider understanding of creativity and the arts therapies. One of example is the concept of *poiesis* (Levine, 1992, 2011). As Levine (1992) puts it, “Within the framework of expressive arts, we could say that *poiesis* implies the capacity to respond to the world in which we find ourselves. We suffer, both individually and collectively, when we find ourselves unable to respond, when this capacity for poetic action is restricted and we experience ourselves as being in a helpless situation. ... The work of the change agent in the field of expressive arts, then, is to restore the capacity for *poiesis* that the individual or community has lost, and to help them expand the range of play within which they can act” (p. 27).

He emphasizes that *poiesis* happens only in the world with others: “We have made this world together; this means that we can make it differently. The particular power of

the expressive arts in the field of social change is to help us find our ability to make a new world together. Only by doing so can we leave to future generations a world which they will find worthy of response” (Ibid, p. 29).

Shaun McNiff has developed his idea of creativity which is sympathetic to the environmental and ecological platform in a number of earlier publications and in particular in his recent book, *Imagination in Action: Secrets for Unleashing Creative Expression* (2015). He believes that “Creativity is a defining quality of the human spirit, a force of nature, the mainstream of imagination accessible to all” (p. 1).

He indicates that “Art has been viewed as representing and interpreting nature but not enough attention has been given to how the process of creation in all its forms acts like nature. Making art is closely related to how things grow and move in the physical world” (Ibid pp. 10-11).

McNiff’s empirical observations of artistic expression as a force of nature are discussed in relation to classical Chinese thought. Correspondence to nature is fundamental to the Taoist and Confucian traditions, both grounded in the idea that *qi/ch’i* (vital energy/life force) is the energetic basis of creative transformation. The principle of *te*, applied to spontaneous and authentic expression, according to this tradition, is explored in relation to practical approaches to helping people everywhere access their unique and natural creative powers.

What I would add to Shaun McNiff’s discussion of *ch’i* and the creative process is art’s ability to establish and develop emotional bonds in relationships. The relational matrix of creative acts suggests the human need and capacity to use art as a means to establish and develop relations with each other and the world around us. The notion of eco-identity (Kopytin, 2016) presents a personality as a function of this relational system in which one’s affective attachment and attunement with nature in the process of therapeutic change and throughout the lifespan in general are crucial and assume a greater significance when implying the human ability to do art as meaningful environmental action and even as a form of co-creation. Doing art in and with nature, together with other activities typical of ecotherapy, such as gardening, animal encounters, simply spending more time in ecologically healthy settings, or more actively working on maintaining and restoring eco-health, can be regarded as a type of environmental action which is characteristic of a person with an established eco-identity, with a strong self-regulating function related to coping skills and adaptivity.

Creative environmental functioning as one of the core aspects of eco-identity is expressed through one’s initiatives to care for and respect the environment and see local green spaces as a source of health and well-being for oneself and others who belong to both human and more-than-human worlds. Eco-identity often makes one socio-politically active, able to engage further in eco-health promotion and become an agent of change in educational, public health and environmental spheres.

About the author

Alexander Kopytin, Doc.Med., psychiatrist and psychotherapist. He holds a position of Professor at Psychology Department, St. Petersburg Academy of Post-Graduate Pedagogical Training and North-West Medical Academy in St. Petersburg. Email: alkopytin@rambler.ru

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