

The Tao of *Poiesis*: Expressive Arts Therapy and Taoist Philosophy

創造之道：表達性藝術治療與道家哲學

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Abstract

This paper outlines some of the similarities between the theory and practice of expressive arts therapy (EXA) and the philosophy of Taoism. EXA is grounded in the concept of *poiesis*, the Greek word for making in general and art-making in particular. The traditional conception of *poiesis* is of a productive activity guided by the consciousness and will of the artist. However, in EXA, *poiesis* is conceived of as a process that can only be beneficial if the client and therapist both let go of knowing and willing, and instead “let it be.” This notion is similar to Heidegger’s concept of *Seinlassen* (letting something show itself as it is in itself), and to Shaun McNiff’s injunction to “trust the process.”

The concept of *poiesis* in EXA is like that of *wu-wei* in Taoism – a “non-action” which nevertheless brings benefits to the one who engages in it and to others. The therapist is like the Taoist sage who leads by non-doing. In addition, the process of “decentering” into the alternative world of the imagination takes the client and therapist into a realm of non-ordinary reality in which resources can be developed and new possibilities for action discovered. The seemingly aimless attitude of *wu-wei* can lead to effective change in the client’s life. The idea of *wu-wei* sheds light on the central phase of an expressive arts therapy session and is an essential attitude for the EXA practitioner.

Keywords: Expressive arts therapy, EXA, Taoism, *wu-wei*, *poiesis*, decentering

摘要

這篇文章概括了表達性藝術治療 (EXA) 與道家哲學在理論和實踐上的異同。表達性藝術治療是建立在 *Poiesis*，希臘語“創造”一詞概念基礎上的，包含了一般性的創造和特殊的藝術創造。傳統概念上的 *Poiesis* 是在藝術家的覺察和願望指導下的生產性活動。但是，在表達性藝術治療中，*Poiesis* 包含著一種進程，只有當來訪者和治療師都放下意願、順其自然的時候這一進程才是有益的。這一概念類似 Heidegger 的 *Seinlassen* (讓事物自然呈現) 和 Shaun McNiff 的 *trust the process* (相信進程)。

Poiesis 的概念類似道家中的“無為”，參與其中的個人和其他人都從中受益。治療師如同無為般引領的道家聖人。此外，“離心化”到想像異處的進程把來訪者和治療師帶到了一個非常態的真實世界中，在這裡資源潛力可以被開發，進行行動的新可能性被發現。這種“無為”的看上去仿佛沒有目的的態度，可以導致來訪者生活的有效改變。“無為”的觀念清晰地體現了表達性藝術治療中的中心部分，是治療師需要具備的基本態度。

關鍵字：表達性藝術治療，道教，無為，創造，去中心化

1. Introduction: Wandering in Expressive Arts and in Taoism

The cavity of the body is a many-storied vault; the mind has its Heavenly wanderings... If the mind does not have its Heavenly wanderings, then the six apertures of sensation will defeat each other.

(Chuang Tzu, 1964, p. 138)

Henry David Thoreau, the great American naturalist, gives a fanciful etymological derivation of the English word, “saunter,” in his essay, *Walking*. To saunter means to walk without aim or purpose. According to Thoreau, the word derives from the French. In the Middle Ages, crusading knights on their way to Jerusalem were said to be going *à la saint-terre* (to the holy land). “Children,” spying wandering beggars, Thoreau writes, would exclaim, “There goes a *Sainte-Terrer*,’ a Saunterer, a Holy-Lander” (Thoreau, 2013, p. 1). To saunter or wander aimlessly is, then, to be engaged in a holy act.

The knights, of course, had a goal in mind: to liberate Jerusalem from the infidels. This could only be done by the sword. For them, violence was the way to sanctity. It is no accident that Thoreau was not only a great naturalist, living alone for a time on Walden Pond and limiting his needs to the bare minimum, but also an apostle of non-violence, protesting the American war against Mexico and the expansion of slavery into the Southwest by going to jail for refusing to pay his taxes. In fact, Gandhi claimed to derive his philosophy of non-violence from Thoreau’s *Civil Disobedience*.

One might well ask, is goal-directed activity necessarily violent? Does action directed to achieving a purpose have to involve force? Is there another Way (*Tao*)? These questions go to the heart of Taoism and to that of expressive arts (EXA) as well. Expressive arts therapy began as “expressive therapy” at Lesley College Graduate School (now Lesley University) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the 1970’s under the leadership of Shaun McNiff, Paolo Knill, Norma Canner and others as an intermodal approach to the arts therapies, as distinguished from the specialized creative arts therapies. Since then, it has been further developed since 1996 under the name of “expressive arts therapy” by Knill and his colleagues at The European Graduate School (EGS) in Switzerland as an explicitly arts-based approach to therapeutic practice, rather than a primarily psychological one (Knill, Levine, E.G., and Levine, S.K., 2004). Subsequently, the field of expressive arts has been broadened beyond therapy to education, coaching and consulting, and conflict-transformation and peace-building.

2. *Poiesis* as a Mode of Wandering

The current author’s contribution has focused on establishing a philosophical foundation for the field. The possibility for the arts to be used in the helping professions is based on the primacy of *poiesis*, the Greek word for making and, specifically, art-making. (Levine, S.K., 1997). *Poiesis* here is taken beyond its original reference to poetry and the other arts in classical Greek culture to refer to the general capacity of human beings to shape their worlds and, consequently, themselves. Art-making is a specific mode of *poiesis* which takes place in the realm of the imaginal. It requires a step away from the actuality of the situation in order to show the possibility for transformation in what is presented

as real. Expressive arts practice in therapy and other fields explicitly calls for entering the alternative world of the imagination as a means of transforming the situation in which the individual or group finds itself. We call this move into the imaginal reality provided by the arts a “decentering,” insofar as it involves a movement away from focusing on the presenting problem or difficulty, taking it out of the “center” of focus in order to investigate imaginative possibilities that may have been concealed therein. How, then, can we understand the practice of *poiesis* in the decentering involved in expressive arts?

Poiesis in this sense goes beyond the instrumental understanding which is directed toward a specific goal. Imaginative engagement requires a letting-go of “end-gaming” and a willingness to explore whatever may come. It requires a giving-up of control and a willingness to “let something be.” In this sense, decentering is similar what is called in Taoism *wu-wei*, the not-doing that is the essence of Taoist practice. To understand this similarity, it may prove helpful to compare the philosophical foundations of Taoism with those of the expressive arts.

What, then, is the relationship between the Tao and *poiesis*? Is there a hidden affinity between *wu-wei* (non-action) and the EXA practice of “decentering” (stepping into the alternative world of the imagination)? These questions will be explored by wandering in the two different realms of Taoist philosophy and the expressive arts on a voyage of discovery. The practice of expressive arts in therapy and its theoretical framework as developed at The European Graduate School will also be outlined.

3. *Poiesis* in Western Thought

Taoism is often understood as a specifically Chinese mode of thought in sharp distinction from Western philosophy. The dominant tendency in Western philosophical thinking takes for granted the purposeful nature of life and of the thinking required to do justice to it. The very structure of philosophical reasoning resembles that of a forceful march through intellectual territory, conquering an opponent by marshaling one’s arguments in order to achieve logical consistency as defined by the principle of non-contradiction – a method which is radically different from the paradoxical expressions of Taoist thought, especially that of the *Lao Tzu*. Socrates himself speaks of the truth in martial terms, describing it as analogous to a soldier who does not run away at the first sight of the enemy but rather is able to stand fast in the face of his onslaughts.

In the Platonic dialogues, Socrates engages in combat with his interlocutors in order to demonstrate the inconsistencies in what they claim to know. And in the *Republic*, the great text of classical political thought, the just society is envisioned as protected by guardians, soldiers who embody the spirit of the city, in the same way as the *thymos*, the spirited part of the soul, is said to be the location of courage and passion, that which drives a person to action. The only class of citizens higher in rank than the guardians are the philosophers, who rule over all by virtue of their knowledge of what is true and therefore best for others.

This conception of philosophy is a far cry from the account of Socrates’ own quest for knowledge, as reported in Plato’s *Apology*. After a fruitless search for a man of wisdom, one who could rationally account for what he claimed to know, Socrates was

led to ask the oracle of Delphi (traditionally thought to be able to enter into trance in order to serve as the mouthpiece of the gods), “Who is the wisest man in Greece?” Her answer, “You are, O Socrates,” only confused him, since he was well aware of his own ignorance. The only conclusion that he could come to was that he alone of all those whom he had questioned was aware that he did not know. The philosopher, then, was not to be understood as one who possessed knowledge, as the Sophists, itinerant teachers of rhetoric and public speaking, claimed to be, but rather one who loved wisdom and, in his ignorance, pursued her wherever he could.

This seems quite different from the conception of the philosopher-ruler in the *Republic* who knows the truth and acts in accordance with it, yet the seeds of the Platonic conception are already contained in the Socratic method. By demanding that those who claim to know provide a consistent and principled explanation of their supposed knowledge, Socrates implicitly assumed that the truth is founded on non-contradiction. Only statements that possess logical coherence can lay claim to truth. If we compare this with the paradoxical utterances of the *Tao Te Ching*, we can see a fundamental difference between Platonic philosophy and Taoism. As the first sentences of the Chinese text are often translated, “Those who know do not speak. Those who speak do not know,” or in Arthur Waley’s classic translation, “The Way that can be told of is not an Unvarying Way; The names that can be named are not unvarying names” (Waley, 1934, p. 141). We can imagine what a Taoist would think of Plato’s *Republic*, where the philosophers rule by their claim to knowledge of ultimate reality.

Why such wandering in the realms of ancient Greek thought? For one thing, the whole of Western philosophy, as Alfred North Whitehead has remarked, can be seen as a series of footnotes to Plato (Whitehead, 1979, p. 39). But not only has Plato’s concept of the supremacy of rigorous knowledge been dominant in the West, his placing of poetry and the arts outside the sphere of truth has also been taken for granted. In the *Republic*, the poets are to be exiled from the just city, since their stories are riddled with inconsistencies and can lay no claim to the constancy of truth. They only serve to disturb the people and keep them from sticking to their appointed tasks. *Poiesis*, then, the making of works that are to be seen or heard, is understood to be completely different from *philosophia*, the knowledge of that which transcends the shifting images provided by the senses. For Plato, science and art are to be distinguished as truth from falsehood.

This denigration of *poiesis* is a rejection of the traditional transmission of knowledge in classical Greece through the stories told in epic and tragedy. *Mythos* is to be replaced by *logos*, story by reason. In fact, the story is the archetypal mode of wandering, in the same way as the storyteller himself goes from city to city telling his tale to those who rule. All stories can be said to descend from the *Odyssey*, that epic account of the wanderings of Odysseus who leaves his home and goes from adventure to adventure without arriving at any other destination than that of returning to where he began. Philosophers, on the other hand, do not wander; they stick to their posts.

Wandering, *yu*, is the way or Way (*Tao*) in which the Taoist Sage proceeds. Instead of laying down principles derived logically from an ultimate truth, he tells stories that show how non-knowing can liberate us from the narrowness of our conceptions. In the Greek language, a principle is an *arche*, and the prince or ruler is the *archon*. Just as the

prince rules over the people, the principle dominates empirical reality. There is a certain tyranny implicit in the formation of concepts that aim to comprehend the wealth of experience by abstraction, a process that can only impoverish our lives. How much more pleasant, Chuang Tzu might say, to wander in the cloud of unknowing and to rest in the boundless.

If there were endless space for this essay, we could wander further in the history of philosophy and show the counter-trends in Western thought to the Platonic concept of knowledge. In fact, Plato himself could never overcome *poiesis*. In the Platonic dialogues, the dominance of reason is presented in the form of dramatic conversations, ultimate truth is only to be conveyed by metaphor, and a mythical account of the afterlife is provided as a guarantee of the truth of Socrates' thinking – all of these are modes of *poiesis*.

Moreover, contemporary Western thought, faced with the destructive impact of the blind application of scientific knowledge to technology in a quest to dominate nature, has re-discovered the cognitive value of *poiesis*, seeking in the divagations of the imagination an antidote to the imperial tyranny of the Idea. Nietzsche, in opposition to the arid dominance of Apollonian logic, appeals to the Dionysian rapture conveyed by Greek tragedy to bring a new birth to the spirit of music (Nietzsche, 1995). And Heidegger, rejecting the theory of truth as the correspondence of statements to what is already present, envisions truth as the uncovering of what is hidden and *poiesis* as the primary mode of this uncovering (Heidegger, 2002) It is from Heidegger, in fact, that expressive arts draws upon this notion of *poiesis* as a way (*Tao*) to truth (Levine, 1997; Knill et al, 2004). As was pointed out, in the method of decentering (setting aside the literal reality of the client in order to enter the alternative world of the imagination), EXA seeks to discover something that was unknown before, to find a surprise that emerges only through letting-go of goal-directed behavior and instead using the arts, disciplines of the imagination, to startle us with the unexpected possibilities that had previously been covered up by over-focusing on the problematic situation.

Poiesis is the way (*Tao*) of expressive arts, a way of wandering, sauntering – “erring,” in the old English sense of the word, going off the beaten track. In the Middle Ages, in addition to crusading knights on their way to conquer the infidel, there were “knights errant,” those who had lost their patrons and were fated to wander the countryside in search of sustenance. For Heidegger, wandering becomes the way of thinking, to the point where he entitled one of his books, *Holzwege* (“forest-paths” – trails in the woods that lead nowhere) (Heidegger, 2002). Only by not-knowing, then, can we discover that which is hidden and reveals itself as a surprise.

However, for this way or method to make sense, it is important that *poiesis* be understood differently than it is usually conceived of in the tradition of Western thought. Under the dominance of the instrumental conception of knowledge, creative action is usually understood as a form of goal-directed behavior. The artist is said to have an idea in his mind and then to impose it upon his material, much the same way as the creator-God has formed the world. Obviously, if this is the case, then *poiesis* cannot result in anything new, only the reproduction of the original idea in a different form. Such a conception often underlies the practice of interpretation in the arts therapies. Art

is then understood as self-expression, as the outward manifestation of an inner state of mind, and the work of art is interpreted as a reflection of a pre-existing mental state that is subject to diagnosis.

The practice of *poiesis*, however, shows us that, whatever the initial idea, feeling or sensation, the image has a mind of its own, taking us into new and unexpected paths. The role of the artist is, as James Hillman often tells us, to follow the image, not to impose a pre-conceived plan, no matter how good it may seem to be. Imagination, we could say, is a cloud-based activity, urging us to let go of our goal and ride upon the wind. It is true that the work of art is expressive, but art-making is not self-expression – this is the lesson that expressive arts practitioners have learned from basing their practice on *poiesis* rather than psychology. In opposition to psychological explanations based on pre-existing formulations, the expressive arts uses a phenomenological method, paying close attention to what shows itself and letting *it* tell *us* what its meaning is, rather than the other way around. Heidegger calls this process *Seinlassen* (letting beings be), that is, letting something show itself as it is in itself. The phenomenological method is particularly appropriate to the arts, since they are disciplines of showing.

4. *Poiesis* and *wu-wei*: Expressive Arts and Taoism

Here is where the convergence of expressive arts with Taoism is most evident. *Poiesis* is not the imposition of an idea on inert material; rather it is a form of *wu-wei*, “non-doing” – activity without force or violence that lets itself be guided by what emerges, following it no matter where it may take us to wander. The term *wu-wei* “describes a state of personal harmony in which actions flow freely and instantly from one’s spontaneous inclinations... and yet nonetheless accord with the situation at hand” (Slingerland, p. 300). If there is a kind of mastery that results from this ability, it is not control over the other but precisely the letting-go of control. We may even say that true mastery comes from the letting go of control.

The artistic process does involve conscious shaping on the part of the artist, as the work of the therapist involves not only receptive listening but also intervening to help the client find his way. However, this shaping is more of a guiding than an imposing, part of the “aesthetic responsibility” of the companion, whether therapist, educator or coach. It does not require artistic expertise in a particular medium but rather the capacity of “low skill/high sensitivity,” that is, being sensitive to what is emerging and ready to follow it wherever it goes. If there is skill involved, it is in the mastery of the guiding process. As Elizabeth McKim, Poet Laureate of the European Graduate School likes to say, “It takes an agile guide / to cross a fragile bridge.” Guiding implies the ability to get lost without falling into a desperate attempt to find one’s way again. It is similar to John Keats’ concept of “Negative Capability,” the essential quality of the poet: “when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason...” The shaping process demands this ability to be “comfortably confused,” as Paolo Knill likes to advise students, until a way appears that one can follow.

The clown classes that Ellen Levine and the author teach to students training to be expressive arts therapists always begin with what is called the “nothing turn.” A “turn” in clown involves getting up in front of an audience and performing in some way, but a

“nothing turn” is when the clown can stand in front of others without doing anything, that is, not trying to amuse but just being there. This is much harder than one might think. Doing nothing does not mean being rigidly still; it implies the capacity to be present, to be fully alive without effortful striving. From this place of aliveness, all kinds of activity can emerge, and the poetic essence of the clown can show itself in a genuine way. In a similar manner, the expressive arts therapist must let go of trying to help the other person by directing them to a goal and, instead, be fully present with them by giving the gift of his own presence (Atkins and Eberhart, 2014). Then the correct path to follow will appear of its own accord. As one of my supervisors used to say, “Don’t just do something – sit there!”

Not-doing is a way of becoming present, of returning to what is called in Taoism the “Uncarved Block” (*pu*), the primal condition of being without form. From this place of pure potentiality, anything can happen. By being present without aiming at a goal, the guide can help the client find his or her own uncarved block and “get out of their own way.” Becoming fully present and returning to the Uncarved Block does not imply passivity. The guide acts, but he does not strive.

Chuang Tzu tells the story of Cook Ting, who “was cutting up an ox for Lord Wen-hui. At every touch of his hand, every heave of his shoulder, every move of his feet, every thrust of his knee – zip! zoop! He slithered the knife along with a zing, and all was in perfect rhythm, as though he were performing the dance of the Mulberry Grove or keeping time to the Ching-shou music.”

Lord Wen-hui marveled at this and exclaimed, “Imagine skill reaching such heights!” To which Cook Ting replied, “What I care about is the Way, which goes beyond skill... I go at it by spirit and don’t look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop and spirit moves where it wants” (*Chuang Tzu*, pp. 46-47).

Wu-wei is effortless activity. It requires letting go of striving after a goal, and instead paying close attention to what is happening. Then action can happen of its own accord, as if it were unfolding by itself. In writing a poem or making music, the poet or musician must first of all listen for the words or sounds that are emerging and only afterwards bring his critical faculties to bear in a process of revision. The expressive arts therapist acts in an “art-analogue” way, by putting aside diagnoses and treatment plans and instead paying careful attention to what is emerging, intervening only to facilitate the process. This may require multiple “takes” or rehearsals on the part of the client, following suggestions by the therapist for ways to act that will allow the process to find its own way and, in so doing, achieve an “aesthetic response” that brings a sense of completion. The paradox of *wu-wei* in therapy or art is that the desired result is to be attained only by giving up all attempts to reach it. It is to let go and “trust the process,” as Shaun McNiff often reminds us (McNiff, 1998), but in doing so to arrive after all at the goal of healing through the experience of beauty.

This way runs counter to our normal mode of behavior. To engage in *wu-wei* or *poiesis* is to follow a road not taken, to wander off the beaten path into undiscovered territory. It is to take the low road, to enter the valley and to give up the ambition of scaling the heights. This process also means letting go of knowledge and control, the two functions of the ego, as Freud characterizes it, that allow us to survive in the world.

The very notion of the deity as omniscient and omnipotent shows the significance of these two activities of the mind. Not only is *wu-wei* foreign to the dominant tradition of Western thought, but the survival mechanisms of the human organism itself lead us to experience non-action as in opposition to our continued well-being. Therefore, a deliberate “step-back” must be taken, a refraining that runs counter to our impulses, in order to activate the potency of *wu-wei*. In French, we say “*reculer pour mieux sauter*,” to step back in order to leap forward. And it is indeed a leap in the dark that we must undertake in order to make things evident that were previously hidden.

5. Not-Even-Anything Land: The Alternative World of the Imagination and the Work of Art

By taking this leap, we land in what Po Chü I calls “Not-Even-Anything Land” (*Chuang Tzu*, p. vii). This is the world of the imagination, where anything can happen and where nothing is fixed or final. Victor Turner calls it a “liminal” or “in-between” space, taking the term from the phase of ritual in which transformation happens by temporarily giving up one’s place in the social structure in order to return with a new and renewed sense of identity (Turner, 1995). For D. W. Winnicott, this is the space of “transitional experience,” in which the infant is in-between identifying with the mother and becoming a separate individual, a space where creativity flourishes. In Winnicott’s view, adult creativity is achieved by temporarily stepping away from purposeful activity and entering the transitional space again (Winnicott, 2005).

In expressive arts therapy, the therapist “decenters” from the literal reality of the person or group and helps them to enter the alternative world of the imagination (Knill, 2004). This is the world of *poiesis*, where new images and symbols can emerge and point the way to previously undiscovered possibilities. To be in this world requires a process marked by “flow,” in which we let things happen and follow them “without any irritable reaching after fact and reason...” This is the process of *poiesis*, the world of poetic (or, we might say, “poietic”) experience.

Moreover it is not only the “process” of *poiesis* that reveals truth, it is also the “product” or work that emerges that enables us to discover what we did not know. For Heidegger, *poiesis* sets the truth into a work. It results in a structure (*Gestalt*) that can hold the tension between uncovering and concealing, what Heidegger calls “World” and “Earth” respectively (Heidegger, 2002). This means that the work shows the truth, bringing it into the light, but also that there is always something concealed in this uncovering. The mystery can never be completely disclosed and remains to be pursued.

Nevertheless, the authentic work affects us; it has an energy that moves us in some way. The Greek word for energy is *energeia*, and a work is called an *ergon*. *Energeia* is sometimes thought of as power in action; the work manifests this power in its impact on the maker. In this sense, expressive arts therapists disagree with the customary maxim of the arts therapies, “It’s the process, not the product.” This slogan is designed to set non-artists at ease, but it neglects the very essence of art-making. Certainly the process is essential, but the artist wants the art-work, not only the experience of making it.

Energeia can be thought of as similar to the Taoist notion of *ch'i*, the breath or life force that animates beings. In African-American culture, an equivalent word for *ch'i* might be *soul*. If a work or a practice does not embody soul, it has no power to move us. It is lifeless and inert; it bores us to tears. The art-work that emerges in expressive arts therapy must have *ch'i* to affect us through an encounter with beauty.

We know when beauty is present by our “aesthetic response” to it, the bodily-affective experience of being “moved” or “touched.” The aesthetic response of the client tells us that the work has had an effect upon him. We call this his “effective reality,” in analogy to H. G. Gadamer’s concept of “historical reality,” that aspect of history that is particularly meaningful for our own situation, in contradistinction to the vast expanse of meaningless historical facts (Gadamer, 2013). It is the “aesthetic responsibility” of the therapist to help the client have an aesthetic response, by means of making a work that brings an experience of beauty.

The work that emerges has a meaning, but this meaning cannot be discovered by putting it into a pre-existing framework. It is important that the work be allowed to unfold its meaning on its own terms. This takes place in the part of an expressive arts therapy session that we call the “aesthetic analysis.” Interpretation in expressive arts therapy takes place by means of a phenomenological method, in which we pay close attention to what has emerged so that *it* can tell *us* what it means, rather than imposing a meaning on it by providing a psychological explanation that is foreign to the arts. Only after the work has revealed itself as fully as possible through a close study can we step back and “harvest” its implications for our literal reality.

This approach has been called “work-oriented” expressive arts therapy. We can also speak of a “play-oriented” session in which the client engages in “free play” without a work being produced, or a “ritual-oriented” one, in which a transition is marked by the making of something that symbolizes an important change in the client’s life-experience (Knill et al, 2004). In each of these cases, the important thing is to set a challenge that the client can meet through activating her own capacities.

6. *Poiesis* as following the *Tao*

The purpose of *poiesis* in expressive arts practice, a purpose achieved only by “letting go of the outcome,” is to help clients contact the resources that they already bear within themselves. Expressive arts therapy is thus a “resource-based” practice that aims to help those with whom we work become aware of their own capacities, an awareness which can be carried over into their literal reality. In this way, *poiesis* can be said to evoke the power of *te*, that innate quality that beings manifest by following the *Tao*. Expressive arts relies on the conception of human beings as essentially “poietic,” that is, as entities capable of shaping their lives in accordance with their own possibilities – in other words, to manifest their own *te* by following the *Tao*. Shaping here does not imply the capacity to make the world or the self however we like. We are not creator-gods with unlimited power. However, we can always respond to what is given, and in this sense we are free to make our worlds and ourselves anew.

7. The *Tao* has no End: Wandering in the Realm of *Poiesis*

The work of *poiesis* never comes to an end. We cannot know or reveal the ultimate truth about the world or about ourselves; therefore, shaping will never be complete. Rather than cause for dismay, the recognition of the limits of our knowledge and action sets us free for an endless search, a wandering farther and farther from home. What could be more pleasant than to wander endlessly in the realm of *poiesis*? Such is the power (*te*) of the Way (*Tao*). Its endless productive capacity is an occasion for wonder, not dismay.

As T.S. Eliot wrote, “We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.” All roads lead to home, so let us set forth on our wandering way and marvel at what lies still ahead. The *Tao* has no end, and only by letting ourselves get lost will we ever come home to tell the tale.

In his essay on walking, Thoreau says, “They who never go to the holy land in their walks, as they pretend, are indeed mere idlers and vagabonds, but they who do go there are saunterers in the good sense... So we saunter toward the Holy Land; till one day the sun shall shine more brightly than ever he has done, shall perchance shine into our minds and hearts, and light up our whole lives with a great awakening light, so warm and serene and golden as on a bank-side in Autumn” (Thoreau, 2013).

And there we shall rest – until we set forth once more.

Leaving homeland, parted from kin, banished to a strange place,

I wonder my heart feels so little anguish and pain.

Consuting Chuang Tzu, I find where I belong:

surely my home is there in Not-Even-Anything land.

Po Chü-I (*Chuang Tzu*, p. vii)

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