

The etymology of the term *shaman* seems to refer to the traditional healers of the Mongol Turkic tribes in Siberia. Shaman might have meant “he who knows,” from the Tungusic word *saman* but the word appears in many guises, from Chinese *sha men*, meaning Buddhist monk and Sanskrit *sramana* meaning “ascetic.” The seriousness of the shamanic initiation and practice “imitate the symbolic events of the psychological, inner one.” (Larsen, 1976, p. 62)

During the time of his early writings, a new awareness of shamanic and native customs entered the literature and imagination of the American public. Peyote ceremonies and primal people’s ceremonial use of hallucinogenic agents became part of the academic discourse. If one wanted to know about alternative views of reality, no serious seeker could ignore the inter-cultural awareness that vision dreams and altered states of consciousness could be accessed through plants, medicines and the ceremonies that surrounded them. Two popular books for the public were written in the years just preceding McNiff’s 1981 publication of *The Arts and Psychotherapy*, where the image of the shaman first appears in the expressive arts literature. One was Michael Harner’s popular *The Way of the Shaman* (1980), written the year before, and Stephen Larsen’s *The Shaman’s Doorway*, written in 1976, five years before.

Core Shamanism is a concept developed by, or attributed to Michael Harner, a teacher of anthropology in the graduate program at the New School of Social Research in New York. In spite of his undoubted sincerity, he has become a prime example of what is known in Southern California as a “Plastic Shaman.” Plastic Shamans use literalized modifications of shamanic practice such as sweat lodges, drumming, sucking out illnesses, soul retrieval and the like. These practices, which seem so potent in their own cultural context, are clear examples of cultural appropriation. Such use of indigenous cultural practices without the context is, for most current scholars, highly objectionable. Loosing sight of the metaphoric quality of the expressive arts image of shamanism makes us vulnerable to new-age-ism, magical thinking and appropriationism.

The Place of the Shaman

Anthropologists currently treat the roles of shaman and medicine man as different entities, serving different roles in the society, although in some circumstances both roles might be held by one person. A medicine man is usually associated with herbal medicines, ointments and other

physical remedies. His techniques for healing do not require an altered state of consciousness, not does he “journey” to another world, and he is not as concerned with the imaginal realm of dreams, images, soul retrieval and visitations. The role of Shaman is strongly associated with the ability to achieve altered states of consciousness, an ecstatic state, sometimes brought on by ritual suffering, or autohypnosis, but often induced by the use of ritual hallucinogens such as peyote. According to Lommel, “The most important thing about the shaman is that by means of a therapeutic process we cannot yet understand or explain he is able to cure mental disorders.” (1967, p.8) There is a division of labor between physical and emotional/spiritual healing.

Traditions of Becoming a Shaman

Most texts agree that, though some do make the decision themselves to become shamans out of family tradition (these are called “lesser shaman”), the “greater shaman” does not choose to be a shaman as one might choose a career. He is called by the spirits, often during some extreme illness that may, to the Western mind, resemble a psychotic episode. The shaman must suffer before he can gain the wisdom to heal. As the Inuit Shaman Igjugarjuk reported to the Danish explorer Rasmussen:

All true wisdom is only found far from men, out in the great solitude, and it can be acquired only through suffering. Privations and sufferings are the only things that can open a man’s mind to that which is hidden from others. (Lommel, 1967, p.151)

Shamanic initiation practices involve suffering. Larsen (1976) reports extreme ordeals such as “be[ing] plunged into icy water, slashed all over with knives of quartz, left alone on the sea ice to fast for thirty days alone; or as was done to one young Eskimo woman, her initiation included being hung up on tent poles for five days in midwinter, and afterwards being taken down, and shot in the chest with a stone instead of a real bullet in order to enable her to communicate with the supernatural.” (pp. 61- 62) All these trials impose a kind of ritual death, a passage through liminal space, and a rebirth into the role of healer.

The Aesthetic Healer

According to Andres Lommel, Director of the National Museum of Ethnology in Munich, the aesthetic role of the Shaman is as significant as his role as healer. Writing in *Shamanism: the Beginnings of Art* in 1967, Lommel calls the shaman “the first aesthetically active human.” He says in his Introduction

We shall find that the study of the shaman as an artistically productive personality leads to far-reaching discoveries on the one hand regarding the artistic personality as such, and on the other regarding the whole history of early art. (p.8)

Stone Age hunters of 20,000 years ago left us the paintings of Lascaux and Altamira. Lommel calls these markings “an early phase of human thinking,” thinking with the hand and the eye. “The shaman,” continues Lommel, exercises the functions of the “priest, spiritual guide, and doctor.” In an attempt to come to terms with his own psychological distress, the shaman often develops considerable ability as a “singer, dancer, painter and theatrical producer.” (Lommel, 1967, pp.9-10)

The Metaphor of the Shaman in the Writing of Shaun McNiff

The Emergence of the Enduring Shaman. Shaun McNiff might have been the first author to make many explicit comparisons of the expressive arts practitioner to the shaman. It is an image which has been present from his earliest writings to his most current work as a source of inspiration and information. “In the mid-1970’s I began to think of the creative arts therapies as contemporary manifestations of ancient shamanic continuities.” (1992, p.18) The notion of the expressive arts practitioner working in a shamanic way, within a community, with enactment and ritual, with music, dance and song, with story and images is, indeed, a powerful and sustaining metaphor. This image of “the enduring shaman,” enters McNiff’s writings in *The Arts and Psychotherapy* in 1981, a time when sensitivity to cultural appropriation was not a widely appreciated standard. McNiff was not working as an anthropologist, but an artist, professor, and creative writer, searching for metaphors to help articulate what he was discovering. He writes, “When we try to literally transfer these practices into contemporary psychotherapy, we will probably be viewed as weird or at least disconnected from how people operate today within the mental health field.” (2004, p.197)

In spite of the obvious differences in the literal realm between shamanism and expressive arts therapy, the shaman remains an important idea and a leading image and metaphor for McNiff. There are many aspects of shamanic practice that he refers to, and in *Art Heals*, “Part Five, Connections to Shamanism”, (McNiff, 2004, pp. 181-208) he makes it clear that he is using the image of shaman as a metaphor. So strong and direct are his declarations, that I suspect it is a

response to a misunderstanding. He does not want to appropriate shamanic practices from primal cultures, as might have been inferred by earlier writings, and says so directly.

“Perceiving shamanism as an archetypal figure ... does not interfere with the sanctity of shamanic practices in closed tribal societies, and it does not attempt to expropriate them for use in the West.” (McNiff, 2004, p. 197)

At the same time, McNiff suggests there is a universality of experience in the shamanic tradition that makes it useful in contemporary life: “The archetypal figure of the shaman is to be found in each of us.” (2004, p.195) He asserts that it is through our images the shamanic dimension enters our experience. Through the portal of the image, we take our journey, like a shaman, into the realms of imagination, which is unlimited. This realm of imagination is, in today’s world, as foreign and exotic, as any literal shamanic practice would be for the average citizen. Today’s television and movie offerings are, of course, images from someone’s imagination, but not of our own making, thus appearing as product from without and not having a personal relationship to us. McNiff’s interest is in bringing vital and soulful experiences into contemporary society. He challenges us to “let go and give up a certain degree of control.” (McNiff, 2004, p. 206) He writes about saving the soul of our ordinary lives, and finding renewal in the commonplace. McNiff wants us to step into the opening created by our images, to encounter in that threshold the mysteries of our lives, to be shocked and awakened by those mysteries, and take back to our ordinary lives some of the magic, some of the spice we encounter there. At the same time, he cautions against a quick interpretation of the image. He writes powerfully about the loss of soul in contemporary life, and his hope that the image and spirit of the internal and eternal Shaman can bring back a sense of sacredness and imagination. He writes, “Creative streams thaw and begin to move freely,” when one works with a shamanic perspective. (2004, p. 206)

Shamanism has helped me to become committed to the eternal therapeutic structures of rhythm, movement, storytelling, ritual, dreaming, free vocal expression, performance, and image-making. They are classical shamanic phenomena that can be engaged directly and without contrivances. ... We begin with as little direction as possible. The shamanic structure is always present within us. ... The simplicity and openness of my approach to the arts and my interest in ritual and the entire gamut of expressive phenomena may be my closest links to shamanism. (McNiff, 2004, p. 203)

The Shaman in Practice. For McNiff (2004), the idea of the shaman is closely associated with psychodrama. “The shaman’s enactments were the beginnings of theater” (p.190). McNiff says that tensions, uncertainties and conflicts in a group which can be the material for ecstatic, real life theater, when guided by the facilitator, reflect shamanic practices. McNiff (2004) sees the shaman as an ecstatic artist.

Psychodramatic methods more closely resemble the practices of shamanism than those of any other form of creative arts therapy. Like the shaman, the psychodrama director is the one who most completely “possessed” by whatever situation is being enacted and this empathic engagement is the basis for disciplined leadership. Like the shaman, Moreno [the founder of psychodrama] was an ecstatic, an artist who believed completely in the healing power of emotion, spontaneous action, and creative sensitivity. (p.191)

McNiff (2004) names numerous qualities and activities, which correspond both to shamanic practice and to the practice of some types of expressive arts therapy sessions.

Research will indicate that, often unawares, we are reviving ancient shamanic practices. For example, drama and dance therapists find themselves spontaneously creating rituals of passage to celebrate people’s confrontation with and overcoming obstacles. Chanting, rhythmic drumming, cathartic expression, and group participation typify their work. Poetry therapy encourages “naming” and personalizing the physical environment. ...Shamanic journeys of ascent and decent characterize active imagination experiences and other creative activities that reenact the traditional myth cycle of “separation-penetration-and-return.” Dramatic improvisations and visual art expressions often border on totemism, with participants identifying themselves with animals that personify both desirable and malevolent attributes. Tutelary spirits, familiars, power animals and talismans are created in art activities expressing needs for support and protection. In all these manifestations of contemporary art and healing practices, essential qualities of the human spirit are expressed in a manner that bears a striking resemblance to shamanism. (pp.191-192)

McNiff suggests that contemporary healers, like shaman, create “interpersonal and physical space that facilitates transcendence and heightened perception” which helps people creatively transform their conflicts and tensions. (2004, p.192)

In my own practice, I often use the studio space as a temporary theater setting, created by the mere suggestion of the fourth wall. Masking tape defines an “on-stage” area. There are simple costumes and suggestions for improvised dialog. When creating a dramatic piece I do not act as if we are “just kidding around.” This is serious play. I do whatever I can to amplify the emotional undertones of the piece we are working on. Sometimes the sense of leaving ordinary

reality is heightened, especially when individuals want to express emotions otherwise unexpressed, or have spontaneous actions that require something more intense than a role play. There is a border where these ideas meet. I include an example of my own work here to illustrate.

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While working with the graduate students at the Institute, one of the students was longing for more attention from her boyfriend. Gradually, we realized she wanted a scene of seduction. The whole class attended the image with the seriousness of a solemn ritual preparation. We created an elaborate boudoir with colored silks and scarves draped everywhere. We found feathers and fur, which gave a sumptuous feel. Her costume was her own underwear, embellished with borrowed high heels, and a hat from my costume rack. We added a sound track as she spoke to her unseen lover. What a steamy monologue! There was a palpable feel of adult sexuality in the room, and we laughed bawdily, fanning ourselves, talking about cool showers or whereabouts of our own lovers when she was finished.

Another time a class dealt with a woman wrapped in the grief of her mother's death. For this scene, we pulled out a large bolster and draped it with back velvet. That was enough to call forth the image of the funeral barge, which we ponderously pushed across the studio, transformed then into the River Styx. Given this somber and mythical environment, she was able to grieve and share the burden of this previously private loss with others.

As the facilitator, I am also in charge of offering options for a Take Two. Numerous times my superimposition of fabric or soundscape helps take a dramatic enactment to its fullest expression, allowing the client to take the play seriously enough to feel something shift in their relationship to the material. To be gripped by the drama, suspending disbelief is the essence of this type of art making. I tend to use the art indigenous metaphor of the Theater Director, but to McNiff, drama's roots are in shamanic enactment.

This improvisational enacting, the essence of shamanic work, is expressive arts work as well. "Drumming, movement, the free use of the voice, enactment, touch, visions, trance and other expressive activities" were the activities of a group that McNiff and Knill facilitated together for five years. "Our emphasis on spontaneous expression, rather than analysis, gave the group its shamanic character." (McNiff, 2004, p.202) Letting everyone get into the act takes people deeper into their own experience. They are more invested, more on the line, more of themselves activated.

In my own work, starting with drumming or music making takes my clients out of the rhythms of the everyday and helps move us both into the metaphoric dimension. McNiff confirms this, writing "...the shamanic qualities of art and healing are most completely activated when we create together with other people and open to one another's expressions." (2004, p.199)

McNiff comments on the associated shamanic metaphor of battling with "evil spirits." If, during the art making session, an image emerges which has a dark feel or grotesque appearance, it can tend to frighten people. They often recoil from it. "What does this terrible thing have to do with me? Why has it come to me?" McNiff's shamanic perspective gives some helpful associated metaphors. Like the childhood struggles between superheroes and super-enemies, these worthy battles and confrontations with grotesque and frightening images allow many important actions to be taken in the studio. Now we have a target for our kicks and slashing rubber swords. We have motivation, to spring into action, to move with vigor, to use the battle cry and the shout of victory. The body can be fully activated. The physicality of the mythic battle "fits the active work we do." (McNiff, 2004, p.203) Of course, sometimes the ugly image comes to be itself comforted or comes as a guardian, as suggested in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. (1957). Here, the newly departed person is asked to stay steady and know that the fire breathing, horned, blood-dripping lion-headed "wrathful deity" has come for their enlightenment. The shamanic perspective allows us to deal with the image, while keeping it safely in the imaginal realm.

McNiff goes to some lengths in his latest writings to make sure we understand that he does not consider himself a shaman but rather to understand that his shaman is an image, a metaphor for certain aspects of his work that inspired and encouraged him. "I found the shaman within myself," he says. He suggests that the image of the shaman is available to all of us as a poetic perspective. This is his central interest in the metaphor of the shamans. In fact, he admonishes:

Focusing exclusively on the literal figure of the shaman limits our direct access to shamanic experience. Since real-life shamans are fully engaged with the poetic and imaginal world, they also embody figures that exist within the imagination itself. The archetypal perspective helps us see manifestations of shamanism within the routine of our daily lives. (McNiff, 2004, p.195)

Besides drumming and enactment, another analogous idea associated with shamanism is the totem animal. That animals should be named separately is significant to me. In the studio, when I have people moving to the animal images I have collected, and I have several hundred, there is nothing more compelling. I believe this is because we are also animals. Our feathered and furry kindred speak to us and acknowledge us through their actions and vocalizations. When we begin to move the animal, we enter an imaginal world predicated upon our own experience of that animal. But totem-ism, literalized, smacks of both appropriation and reductionism. Real animals are not inherently symbolic of anything any more than a human being is. “The shamanic approach, with its closeness to nature, carefully observes the specific and unique qualities of phenomena, being wary not to generalize about images.” (” (2004, p.204) Animal images can be powerful prompts for the imagination. As McNiff writes:

Within the shamanic context, an animal that appears in a dream may be approached as a source of empowerment or as a guide. The sacred perspective enables us to see the animal as something distinct from ourselves ... Shamans and many contemporary therapists of the imagination might encourage us to talk with the animal, travel with it, and maybe adapt its sensitivities to our lives. (2004, p.204)

Working with animal images, whether as felt images in physical imagination, as found images, or as dream images, creates a strong understanding of the doorway between ordinary reality and the imaginal realm. My coyote, my raven, and my butterfly capture my attention, my imagination, and I will follow where they lead, if I can.

Logical Extrapolation of the Metaphor of the Shaman

Role of the Practitioner. Therapist as Shaman. The expressive arts practitioner as conductor of rituals, as healer and as artist, is well served by the shamanic image. The ability to work with psychological conflict and struggle through creative action and enactment is another tight similarity. The artist, [and the expressive arts practitioner], “like the shaman, demonstrates how one can live with heightened sensitivity and how art heals by transforming our actions and our perceptions of life.” (2004, p. 187) And, as shamans constructed spaces that facilitated healing and change, so too, do expressive arts practitioners “construct spaces that help people transform their conflicts and tensions.” (2004, p.192) In community art, the facilitator shaping the group experience could easily be thought of as a shaman, bringing forth the ceremony needed

in the community to insure peace, connection or commonality of experience, but with improvisation rather than generations of traditions as the guiding principle.

What does it mean metaphorically to consider the expressive arts practitioner as shaman? Most anthropological descriptions on shamanism take a close up, tribe-specific view of the role. The more literally we take the metaphor, the more difficult it is to find the connection to the field. Typical literal shamanic experiences do not fit the expressive arts practitioner – dietary rules, for example, and body modifications. The trance state, the skin costume with its mask and embellishments, the constant drumming and performance by the shaman can seem quite different from the modest dress and attitude of the currently practicing expressive arts practitioner. A shaman is an imposing figure, a fierce and feathered man (usually), whose activities lie somewhat outside of the normal range of human behavior. The expressive arts practitioner, is welcoming and nurturing (even while challenging), and typically female. She may call herself a wild woman, but her grooming, manner and behavior are not truly atypical of a practicing professional.

The call which is answered by the expressive arts therapist is also quite different from that of a shaman. We might guess that many people entering graduate work in helping professions have suffered loss, even great loss, privations or illness. Still, few students face psychosis or torture as a part of their preparation for practice, as do shaman. Perhaps for our view, shamanism and the person of the shaman might need to be separated.

Another area where the metaphor breaks down is in the concept of expressive arts therapists as healers. In the current discourse of the field, there is a lively debate about whether what we are doing can even be rightly called healing. Healing carries with it the old medical model approach that an expert applying the proper treatment to the illness can cure it. Even within the medical model, most mental illness has an assumed quality of permanence, which leads to expectations of treatment, but not healing. In the parlance of the San Diego community of expressive arts therapists, we prefer the concept of helping to manage change. Sometimes change has come unbidden to the client/artists life. Other times, change is the desired outcome of the session. If we understand healing as a change in a client/artists ease with their problematic situation, it

begins to approach our theory. Even this simplistic definition must be located within the constant flux of change that is the state of being in the world.

The Role of the Client. The client is the person possessed by illness. There are ways in which the logic of the shamanic metaphor works brilliantly in describing the relationship between expressive arts practitioner and client. In the literal ritual space, the therapist's expertise is focused on leading the client safely into the vast unknown territory of the imagination. However, the expressive arts client is expected to be more active than the shamanic client is, and the practitioner more of a co-creator and less the magic man.

Process of Working. Working is the journey between worlds. Here there are strong resonances to the shamanic tradition. The ideal of entering liminal space, or going into the imaginal realm is part and parcel of every ritualized experience. But the idea that the therapeutic process requires the client to undergo a passage into an alternative experience of the world, a dream world or imaginal world and return with new information puts the client in the space of experiencing movement in the direction of better functioning. Sometimes this is a change of perspective. The ritual provides the frame for the encounter. This type of rite may or may not be conducted by a shaman, but the change is produced by the actions of the ritual participant. In much the same way, when these passages are facilitated by the therapist, the therapist does not create the change. In this way, the image of shaman as an agent of healing looks closer to a physician than to an expressive arts therapist. However, the shaman's ability to work within social contexts, like the expressive arts practitioner ability to work with groups and communities, is similar. Likewise, the expressive arts practitioner's willingness and ability to engage frightening or demonic images is shamanic in nature or compatible with the shamanic view. Lastly, the shaman's use of rhythm, drumming, costume, enactment, ritual, movement, story—telling, and importantly, protecting the creative space, is reminiscent of the actions of the expressive arts practitioner.

The Art Work. A Message from Beyond. In another strong parallel, expressive arts work, like some shamanic rituals, is the encounter with a third entity, a being from this other realm. This is what actually helps the client effect change. In the process of therapy, it is often the

artwork, in whatever form, that carries this new information. This presence of an additional relationship in the therapeutic process could be analogous to the agents of the spirit world that allow the shaman to help heal the ill person. The artwork might play a role in the experience of the appearance of a totem animal. However, this type of totem or spiritual agent exists phenomenologically, and is visible to both client and therapist in consensual reality. It is a thingly thing, not supernatural, no matter how powerful it may appear.

Change may not occur, or may occur in an unexpected or even undesirable direction. One strong theory of change in expressive arts therapy is based upon the metaphor of chaos and autopoiesis; that is, we introduce perturbation into a system (person, family, work group or the like) the situation will move away from order, into chaos, until a new order can be established by the principle of self-organization. Hopefully, this is at a better level of functioning. The process of making offers, supporting the client in the art making process and helping the client to encounter the unknown in the form of the work is central. The therapist's willingness to approach the unknown is the key thing that offers the client a partner in change.

Another possibility suggested by McNiff is that the artwork might itself be considered a kind of shamanic presence. But then, what role does the therapist play? Perhaps the supporting village, enacting the rituals as requested. It seems the role of therapist is the true target of McNiff's metaphor.

Theory of Change. The Return to Normal. Considering the theory of change in shamanism requires some thought about what the shaman considers illness to be. There is a difference between the Western medical model for treating mental illness and the tribal/shamanic conception. Western medicine treats mental illness as a disease process. It looks to individual causes, such as abnormalities in neurochemistry or abnormalities in brain structure that might lead to the aberrant behavior. Treatment commences with the idea of trying to manage the effects of these abnormalities. In cases such as simple depression, the conception is that we can return a person to normal, meaning a state where with the help of medication, their brain chemistry comes to resemble that which we understand as normal. In the case of severe illness such as schizophrenia, which we consider incurable, the treatment is largely undertaken with the

idea of suppression of symptoms, so that the observed behaviors of the patient might become closer to societal norms.

By comparison, the shamanic tradition treats mental illness as a kind of spirit possession, something that “happens to” a person, rather than because of that person’s physical or biological make-up, history or life experiences. The problem is often considered a tribal, village or community problem rather than an individual one. The shaman undertakes rituals and ceremonies to exorcise the evil spirit, appease the ancestors, or lift the curse, so that the individual might return to normal relationships, and a kind of balance is restored to the larger environment of the village. How does this theory of illness and wellness tally with the theory of change for expressive arts therapy?

Expressive arts seems to lie somewhere in between the Western and shamanic conceptions of illness. On the one hand, we often treat the individual, with some expectation of restoring a sense of personal well being. On the other hand, we often see the environment, culture and the state of the world as large factors in a person’s illness of suffering. So this idea of the restoration of health is often tempered by a type of symptom management, designed to assist the client cope with things that he cannot change. Additionally, expressive arts therapists also work in the area of developing potential, helping clients find the “what’s next?” This idea, of intentionally introducing change, is quite alien to primitive cultures, where the idea of change or development of individual potential is often seen as an unwelcome threat to the culture of the tribe or village. These ideas then, cover the difference in motivations for treatment.

When we enter the actual theory of change within the architecture of a session, or a shamanic encounter, there are marked similarities. Decentering involves an encounter with an alternative reality that moves us away from the problem-focused narrative. Both the shaman and the expressive arts therapist use special techniques that are based in art and ritual, to help the person cross the threshold into liminal space. Once in the alternative world of imaginal reality, there are tasks to be undertaken, to achieve the desired outcome.

In the world of the shaman, these tasks are usually highly codified passed on through tribal tradition. The rituals may have great historic or cultural significance, including reenactments of mythic struggles or origin stories. Because the illness is a tribal one, it could be considered the return of an old nemesis, or equally, the wrath of an ancestor who has been dishonored by the actions of his clan. The shaman undertakes a kind of diagnosis, in order to suggest a treatment plan, designed to help the person achieve a normal existence. A person under the shaman's care must never question this prescription. The certainty of expertise protects the client in this theory of change.

The tasks of an expressive arts therapist are never codified. Each case is individual, and in individual therapy, every offering must be a response to something observed in the client's speech, affect, mannerisms or narrative. Each suggestion is given as an offering, which the client may reject or accept. Even when therapist's idea seems a brilliant or insightful one, the final power of choice remains with the client/artist. They must eventually carry out the task with the support of the therapist. Unlike the codified care of the shaman, the successful way is not guaranteed. The image of shaman faces its greatest divergence from the published theory of the field in its theory of change.

The Significance for the Narrative of the Field: Therapy as Shamanic Ritual. As metaphor, the shaman is an aesthetically active being, healing with ritual and ceremony, using visual art, music, drama, dance and chant or poetry. She may work these rituals to heal individuals or communities. These resonances make the shaman metaphor fit our field quite well. It emphasizes the active and aesthetic role of the practitioner, the polyaesthetic actions of the session, and its tribal or community implications. Many shamanic cultures throughout the world define illness as loss of soul. McNiff writes:

the shamanic loss of soul may be attributed to the absence of sacredness and imagination in a person's life. A yearning for these qualities is what underlies the increased interest in shamanism that we see today. (2004, p.204)

For McNiff, the arts recall this soulfulness when they enliven the imagination and present rituals to celebrate sacredness. In this way, they have the ability to return a soulful quality to our lives just as the shaman does. The central metaphor of the shaman and its attending and embedded

images: totem animals, the drum, vocal improv, costume, ritual, are all ways to help the practitioner step forth, shout and sing, be bold and unafraid to act spontaneously in a dramatic manner. It is in this realm of soul that the arts, therapy, shamanism and spirituality meet and occasionally overlap. The metaphoric shaman can serve the narrative of the field, as a way of understanding travel into the realm of imagination. In this encounter, therapist and client make vital contact with the poetic, metaphoric and imaginary perspectives. However, it is in the nuances of the narrative, the why we are doing what we are doing, that the metaphor loses its power to accurately convey the narrative of the field.

One large difference is the process orientation of the expressive arts practice verses the replication of the proper and correct way of the shaman. In shamanic tradition dances and songs are not considered for their aesthetic merits, whereas in the expressive arts we do want it to work, we want to “take it on the road.” In shamanic tradition bringing unity of purpose to the community is a major focus of the ritual. In expressive arts therapy, although community work is an integral part, much of the work is done with and for an individual.

There are no Take Twos in shamanism. Changing the dance or song from the traditional ceremony is tantamount to prescribing impure medicine. It is the song-form, the dance-form, the precise order of the words spoken, or the details of the story told, which achieve the healing. To shape the work aesthetically or to give feedback about the work is alien and irrelevant to the task of the shaman. The role of the shaman is to preserve tradition and discourage change within the art and ritual of the community. And the desirable change in the client is that they return to the normal and customary behavior of the village, tribe or clan.

This is a rather large divergence from the work orientation of the expressive arts field, where shaping, Take Twos and aesthetic analysis are considered part of the aesthetic responsibility of the therapist. The prescriptive for an expressive arts practitioner is to serve the emergent image initially, so that later, the image in its thingly presence might in turn serve the client/artist. To do otherwise limits the field to a kind of cathartic art making; this runs counter to the theory of change in the field. And there are other problematic points to the metaphor.

Expertise versus Co-creation. Does the image of shaman reduce the role of the client in his or her own work? Like Penny Lewis' moon goddess image from the introduction, a shaman is considered to possess supernatural power and ability to intervene in the situation of the client. If the therapist is so considered, it places her in the role of having special-knowledge or expertise in the challenges, problems and life of the client. While it is true that a trained therapist has a great deal of knowledge about the facilitation of the art and ritual process, the client's role as co-creator is also important in terms of expressive arts theory. The shamanic theory more closely aligns with the typical medical model approach, reducing the role of the client to one who is to be passively healed. While shamanic rituals often require the cooperation of the ill person, it does not generally seem to be the case that the ritual can be suggested, shaped or even rejected by the client. I think it is safe to say that, although the cultural variations are vast, there is little room in the typical shamanic structure for true co-creation. Even while enlisting the community's help, it is the shaman who shapes the work.

Divinity versus Humanity. The type of special knowledge possessed by the shaman comes from the supernatural realm, and is not available without the shaman as channel to the divine, the spirit world, or the ancestors. This means that the shaman is holy, and can in no way be a peer or co-creator with the client. Applied to the therapist, this sets up an unbridgeable divide between client and therapist, reminiscent of the role of a Catholic priest. The client comes, stuck and in failure, to beg for holy intervention. It seems an especially sharp contrast to the solution-focused idea that the client's work brings both the problem and solution in one package.

Nevertheless, the shaman reminds us of our human history and birthright as art-makers. It gives us permission to be outrageous and dramatic. It is truly polyaesthetic and therefore intermodal. It gives imaginal elements an important and real place in dealing with modern situations of restriction and disability. These are the central or most important findings to me. In all, it is an enduring shaman.