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Following the Movements of Trees: Nature as a Portal to Creative Flow and Somatic Expression

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Following the Movements of Trees: Nature as a Portal to Creative Flow and Somatic Expression An Experiential Study on *EcoPoetry* and *VocalAesthesis* in Natural Environments

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Abstract

This paper investigates the dynamic relationship between nature, creativity, and embodied artistic practices through the experiential workshop *EcoPoetry and VocalAesthesis*. Co-facilitated by Panayotis Terzakis (singer and voice coach) and Alexia Kalogeropoulou (poet and researcher), the workshop blends vocal improvisation, somatic movement, and ecological poetry within forest settings. Central to this study is the exploration of how sensory and kinaesthetic immersion in natural environments enhances creative flow, emotional regulation, and ecological awareness. Employing a practice-based methodology involving site-specific performances, reflective journaling, creative writing and movement improvisation, the research reveals that embodied presence in nature not only fosters artistic expression, but also a deeper somatic connection to the environment. The findings suggest significant implications for creative education, arts therapy, and environmental engagement, highlighting nature as a vital catalyst for holistic creative processes in contemporary contexts.

Keywords: Creativity, EcoPoetry, VocalAesthesis, performance, creative writing.

Following the Movements of Trees

In the digital age, marked by constant stimuli and growing emotional disconnection, many artists and educators are turning back to nature - not only as a source of inspiration but also as a means for meaningful reconnection and renewal. This paper centres on the experiential workshop *EcoPoetry and VocalAesthesis*, which investigates how immersive, embodied practices within natural environments can catalyse creative flow and deepen emotional regulation. Developed by Panayotis Terzakis, *VocalAesthesis* approaches the human voice as a profoundly somatic instrument, while *EcoPoetry* emphasises poetic expression rooted in ecological consciousness and sensory immersion.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on multiple theoretical perspectives to frame the research:

- **Ecocriticism** (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996) highlights the interconnection between literature, art, and ecological awareness, emphasising the role of natural environments in shaping human perception and creative expression.
- **Contemporary environmental aesthetics** (Berleant, 2004, 2018) provides a lens for understanding immersive engagement with natural landscapes as aesthetic and participatory experiences, linking perceptual experience with ethical and ecological awareness.
- **Psychology of flow** (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) explains the conditions under which deep engagement and optimal creative experience occur, informing the workshop's design to foster immersion and focus.
- **Embodied cognition** (Johnson, 2009) and somatic arts approaches (Rappaport & Rubin, 2011; Knill, Barba, & Fuchs, 2004; Koch & Fuchs, 2011) frame the role of bodily awareness and movement in knowledge, perception, and creative processes.
- **Biophilia and arts-health research** (Wilson, 2016; Bungay, Chatterjee, & Hogan, 2021) provide evidence for the positive impact of nature engagement and creative practices on human wellbeing and ecological empathy.

Together, these perspectives create an integrated framework connecting the workshop's practices, movement, voice, and creative writing, to ecological awareness, creative flow, and self-reflective insight. The works of Berleant (2004, 2018) emphasise the aesthetic and participatory qualities of natural environments, while Csikszentmihalyi (1990), Johnson (2009), and somatic arts theorists illustrate how embodied and mindful engagement can foster deep immersion and creative insight. Rappaport and Rubin (2011) highlight the value of reflective expressive practices for accessing internal experience and creative intelligence, and Wilson (2016) and Bungay et al. (2021) situate these processes

within the broader context of biophilia, wellbeing, and arts-based educational practice. This convergence supports the following conceptual cycle: engagement with nature → embodied movement → vocal expression → expressive writing → self-awareness → enhanced creativity → creative writing.

Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

- *How does immersion in natural settings affect creative thinking, artistic expression, and processes of self-reflection? (RQ1)*
- *In what ways does kinaesthetic interaction with nature — such as mimicking the movements of trees — act as a catalyst for creative flow and emotional regulation? (RQ2)*
- *How can creative writing practices, when integrated with embodied and vocal exploration in nature, contribute to increased self-awareness and the articulation of inner experience? (RQ3)*

By expanding the inquiry to include expressive writing and self-awareness, the research highlights the multidimensional ways in which nature can act as a co-creator in human creativity. These questions situate the study within broader discussions of ecological aesthetics, somatic psychology, and arts-based education, emphasizing the creative and reflective potential of embodied practices.

Methodology

A practice-based approach was employed, focusing on experiential learning and creative embodiment. The workshop took place in a forest near Dionysos, Greece, and included:

- Site-specific performance
- Movement improvisation
- Vocal improvisation based on the VocalAesthesis method¹
- Reflective journaling
- Creative writing based on the EcoPoetry techniques²

Participants were guided to attune to the movements of trees through breath, posture, and gesture, embodying their qualities before transitioning into vocal exploration and creative writing. Data was collected through observational notes, and participants' written

¹ Developed by Panayotis Terzakis, VocalAesthesis approaches the human voice as a profoundly somatic instrument.

² Eco-poetry is a broad field that focuses on environmental poetics and the human–nature relationship

reflections, which were analysed thematically to identify emergent patterns related to creative flow and somatic engagement.

Embodied Practice in Nature

Participants were invited to root themselves physically and mentally into the forest environment, mimicking tree structures and engaging in slow, intuitive movement. Awareness extended beyond the individual, promoting a collective presence that blurred the boundaries between self and environment. This embodied immersion fostered grounding, openness, and a deepened sensory connection to the living landscape.

Following movement exercises, vocal practices employed techniques such as deep humming and vowel projection, encouraging emotional release and resonance with the surrounding nature. Many participants reported experiencing their voice as echoed by the forest, which enhanced feelings of belonging and presence.

The final phase involved creative writing, where participants transformed their embodied experiences into poetic language. Writing emerged organically from sensory memory, completing a creative loop from body to voice to word, and illustrating the synthesis of ecological consciousness with personal artistic expression.

Key Findings

The findings presented below emerged from a qualitative analysis of data collected throughout the workshop. Data sources included participants' written reflections, post-session questionnaires, creative writing outputs produced at different stages of the workshop, and observational field notes taken by the facilitator. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring experiential patterns related to grounding, embodiment, emotional awareness, and creative expression. In addition, comparative reading was applied to early and later writing samples in order to trace qualitative shifts in language, imagery, and affective depth. The attribution of specific outcomes to particular practices is based on the sequencing of the exercises and participants' explicit reflections connecting their experiences to the methods employed.

Nature-based grounding practices increased creative receptivity and imaginative openness. Participants reported heightened sensory awareness and reduced cognitive preoccupation, which was reflected in subsequent writing through richer spatial attention, vivid imagery, and fluid imaginative associations.

Embodied practices in nature contributed to a reduction in internal mental chatter and greater emotional clarity. Participants described a shift from effort-driven writing to a more

receptive, responsive mode of expression, indicating that embodiment functioned as a preparatory condition for reflective and emotionally coherent creativity.

Vocal exercises based on the *VocalAesthesis* method facilitated experiences of resonance, emotional release, and expressive expansion. These effects were evident in the sonic qualities, rhythm, and emotional intensity of the texts produced after the vocal work, suggesting a strengthened connection between bodily sensation, voice, and language.

Initial discomfort related to exposure diminished over time through group support and the environmental anonymity provided by the natural setting. This dynamic reduced self-consciousness and enabled participants to take creative risks with greater ease.

Comparative analysis of creative writing outputs revealed clear qualitative shifts: texts produced after the immersive, embodied, and reflective practices demonstrated richer metaphorical language, more vivid natural imagery, and greater emotional depth than earlier exercises.

Overall, the findings indicate that immersive, embodied, and nature-based practices support an integrated creative process that enhances both artistic expression and self-awareness, positioning ecopoetry-informed methods as effective tools for relational and experiential creative development.

The key findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

- Nature-based grounding increased creative receptivity and imaginative thought.
- Participants experienced a reduction in internal mental chatter and increased emotional clarity.
- Embodied interaction with nature facilitated intuitive and authentic creative expression.
- Vocal exercises based on the *VocalAesthesis* method helped participants experience resonance and emotional release, further enhancing their expressive capacities.
- Initial discomfort with exposure diminished through group support and environmental anonymity.
- The creative writing produced after these experiences demonstrated richer metaphorical language, vivid natural imagery, and greater emotional depth compared to earlier writing exercises conducted throughout the workshop, indicating an integrated development of creativity and self-awareness.

Reflections and Implications

This research suggests that embodied engagement with natural environments offers a potent avenue for creative and emotional expression. The workshop model promotes a shift from product-driven creativity toward process-oriented, ecological engagement. These

practices hold potential for incorporation into educational settings such as creative writing, voice training, and environmental education programs. Additionally, the integration of vocal and somatic techniques with expressive writing connects directly to the arts, self-awareness, and personal growth, highlighting their value for fostering reflective insight, artistic development, and emotional resilience.

Further research could explore longitudinal effects of embodied ecological practices and their applicability in diverse cultural settings. The findings also call for expanded interdisciplinary collaboration among ecocriticism, somatic psychology, and arts education to foster holistic creative development rooted in environmental consciousness.

Conclusion

In the face of ecological crises and widespread creative fatigue, returning to nature through embodied, co-creative practices offers pathways toward deeper connection and authentic expression. This study advocates for a relational, ecological model of creativity — one where voice, movement, and writing are deeply connected to the living world. Such an approach not only enriches artistic practice but also fosters ecological empathy and holistic wellbeing.

This study explored the interplay between nature, embodied practices, and creative expression through the *EcoPoetry* and *VocalAesthetics* workshop. Findings provide clear evidence addressing each research question:

- **Impact of immersion in natural settings on creativity and self-reflection (RQ1):** Participants demonstrated enhanced creative receptivity and imaginative thought, alongside reduced internal mental chatter. Reflective writing showed richer metaphorical language, vivid natural imagery, and greater emotional depth, illustrating those immersive experiences in nature support both artistic expression and introspective awareness. This aligns with ecological aesthetics (Berleant, 2004, 2018) and biophilia theory (Wilson, 2016), which emphasize the role of natural environments in fostering perceptual engagement and wellbeing.
- **Role of kinaesthetic interaction with nature in creative flow and emotional regulation (RQ2):** Embodied movement, such as mimicking tree structures and attuning to the forest environment, facilitated intuitive and authentic expression while enhancing emotional clarity. Participants' accounts indicate that kinaesthetic engagement served as a catalyst for creative flow, reducing effort-driven expression and enabling responsive, somatically informed writing. These findings support theories of embodied cognition and somatic arts (Johnson, 2009; Rappaport & Rubin, 2011).

- **Integration of creative writing with embodied and vocal practices for self-awareness (RQ3):** Vocal exercises and writing practices combined with movement enabled participants to translate embodied experiences into expressive language, strengthening the connection between body, voice, and imagination. The resulting texts evidenced heightened emotional intensity and reflective depth, confirming that integrative, nature-based methodologies promote self-awareness and creative articulation. This outcome reflects the theoretical convergence of somatic arts, flow psychology, and ecocritical perspectives, illustrating a holistic, relational model of creativity.

Overall, this research demonstrates that immersive, embodied, and ecological practices not only enhance artistic expression but also cultivate self-reflective insight, emotional regulation, and ecological attunement. By linking findings explicitly to the RQs and theoretical framework, the study underscores the value of combining *EcoPoetry* and *VocalAesthetics* method in nature as a model for relational and experiential creative development. These findings reflect preliminary insights from an ongoing study, highlighting directions for further research and continued exploration of nature-based, embodied creative practices.

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