

Chapter 9: The Power of Place: Protest Site Eco-Paganism

"[K]nowledge of spiritual phenomena without understanding its physical context is like making love with a man who does not know himself, because he has lost his connection to the earth ..."
(Syme, 1997: 217).

The relationship between spiritual experience and the organic environment is an ancient theme (Bernstein, 2005) that is increasingly voiced today (Fox, 1996; Taylor, B., 2005). However, although the significance of this intimate connection has been pondered by many, few have considered its deeper roots: by applying the enactive process model to my ethnography, I demonstrate that this connection is grounded in embodied situated cognition.

My 'Eco-Paganism Literature review' identified two fluid groups: urban and protest site Eco-Pagans. Having considered the role of embodied situated cognition for the former, I now turn to the latter. My autoethnography (Chapter 7), described my own experiences and now serves to frame a more analytical view. Although urban and protest site Eco-Pagans crossover to some extent and are similar in many ways, this chapter unearths significant differences, and continues to piece together a pattern of the power of place.

Although many site Eco-Pagans practice a spirituality without labels, it is deeply felt and emerges from an embodied knowing of connection gained through powerful processes that include meditation and ritual. Training helped urban Eco-Pagans to articulate the felt sense and although site Eco-Pagans eschew formal training, the felt sense remains significant, though less well articulated. The most important process of connection for site Eco-Pagans is the wilderness effect, which catalyses a sense of spiritual connection, increases personal empowerment and can alter the sense of self. Amongst other things, this helps explain site Eco-Pagan's "very strong self identification with the land" (Plows, 1998b: 45), which is seen "as sacred" (Worthington, 2005: 214). The process of connection can blur the boundaries between self and other, enabling a powerful communion with the genius loci which empowers activism, inspires spirituality and informs site Eco-Paganism.

Introducing the Research Participants

I interviewed a representative sample of thirteen protest site Eco-Pagans from various of backgrounds. They included two Druids (John and Jo), one Heathen (Oak) and six eclectic Pagans whose practice was influenced by a variety of traditions including witchcraft¹, Druidry, Shamanism, Heathenry, Wicca and Buddhism (Adam, Dave, Ian, Jan, Millie and Rob). Dave, Debbie, Lauren, and Ray felt drawn to Paganism at the time of my interviews but the latter three were ambivalent about labelling their spirituality.

1 I deliberately do not capitalise the term witchcraft to distinguish this eclectic set of practices from any Craft Tradition.

At the time I interviewed them, eight participants lived on site B (Ray, Dave, Jake, Debbie, Jan, Jo, Lauren and Millie), while Oak lived in woodland not far from the site and was a regular visitor who often stayed overnight. The interviews with Oak, Debbie, Jan, and Millie² took place during the pilot phase but I have included them as there was no major change in my research agenda. John, Rob and Ian were itinerant and Adam³ lived in a caravan in the West country. Nine of my participants had lived⁴ on more than one protest site and most of those nine had been involved for several years (John, Dave, Debbie, Ian, Jan, Lauren, Oak, Ray, and Rob). By the conclusion of my fieldwork only Jake and Jo were still living full-time at site B, as the rest had moved on to other protests (Ray), settled woodland communities (Oak, Jan and Lauren) or more conventional homes (Dave, Debbie and Millie). Participants ages were between nineteen and early sixties, with the overall age range slightly more in the twenties. Although given the size and distinctiveness of the protest community complete anonymity is impossible to guarantee, in all cases names have been changed.

SPIRITUAL PATHWAYS

The protest site Eco-Pagans I met had a great deal in common with their urban counterparts, notably in that they all emphasised connection with the land or place. Everyone related this connection to their spiritual experiences, and in some cases it resulted in profound - sometimes life changing - experiences. This sense of connection was encouraged by a strong preference amongst most participants (9) for intuitive, embodied ways of knowing: Such knowing of the heart (John) or stomach (Adam) was considered to be far more important than "head" knowing. For some this was reflected in a reluctance to "give names to stuff" (Debbie), especially labelling one's spiritual path (4). None of this reluctance was due to disappointment with any perceived lack of environmental awareness in mainstream Paganism, although some participants (6) knew of Pagans who lacked ecological awareness. Most who adopted the name 'Pagan' didn't identify with mainstream Paganism, so had less of a sense of disappointment than the urban Eco-Pagans (7). However, for John and Jo, both Druids, it was a source of considerable anger and even confusion, and they frequently complained about the situation. Both remained active within their Tradition and energetically promoted environmental awareness.

Finding a Name

In common with their urban counterparts, many site Eco-Pagans (7) had explicitly taken the name "Pagan" and two felt it fitted them, but several participants (4) resisted names because they felt their spirituality was evolving and labelling it was limiting. Ian's spirituality was "inseparable" from the rest of his life:

It's a way of life. [...] I don't like to focus on saying 'Oh this is my spirituality'

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- 2 My interview with Millie was truncated and lasted about half as long as other interviews on site B. However, given that I lived on-site with Millie for about a month I am confident that I my understanding of her practice is sufficient.
 - 3 Circumstances required me to interview Adam using the ethnographic interview technique described in my methodology.
 - 4 I define living at a site as having your own personal sleeping space on the site for at least a month.

'cos that's only what other people call it. [Short laugh]. [...] Not much is separable, it's humans that create the separations. [...] I see things are all part of each other.

Rob spoke in similar terms, though he accepted the name fitted:

Neopaganism - that's probably what someone would call me, the way I synergize that ... spiritual aspect of my anarchism and the fight to defend nature and things like that. [...] so it's all quite connected [...] spirituality kind of gives me the energy for [direct action], keeps me going, and it's not just a raging against the system or whatever, its also a celebration of life as well.

Jan, Lauren and Debbie also gave the impression that spirituality was an integral part of life that did not require any specific practices.

"Paganism" was the name Jo found in her early 20's for her "love of the land, a love of nature, and a lot of history". She began with a Wiccan approach as it was the one of the Farrar's books (e.g. Farrar, J., and Farrar, S., 1981) that introduced her to Paganism, but after a few years she moved on:

it took a long while for me suddenly think 'OK, I think my path is more nature based', and that's how I sort of moved towards Druidry. [...] the Druid path seemed to go more towards the ancestors, and nature and the trees.

However she had been struggling as she felt her path lacked depth, and was emphatic that moving on to a protest site was "*definitely* part of [her] Journey" because "as a Pagan [...] I have to fight for the land because, the land is what I hold as sacred". Jo's experience is typical of the more traditionalized site Eco-Pagans, and is echoed by Motherwort, a Wiccan I met at Lyminge Forest protest in 1998:

I do not pretend to talk for the pagans living at Lyminge, but for me protesting is definitely part of my spiritual growth. It reconnects me to my mother, the earth and helps me to sort out what is really important in my life (Roberts and Motherwort, 2006. Capitalization as in original).

Like some other site Eco-Pagans, and many in the urban group, Jo found it:

very disheartening that, the majority of Pagans don't see it that way. [...] I do despair a lot of the time that a lot of them aren't [pause] in it because they really care about the land and the Earth. It's more themselves. It's something they want to do and their egos and they like the dressing up, but they don't wanna get their - don't get their velvet dirty is what I always say! [Laughs].

She suggested this might be because "they spend too much time indoors" and wondered if other Pagans "see it as part of the same thing? I mean a lot of people just see it as, 'I do magic, I do spells, I do ritual' ". Her comments were the most eloquent, but were typical of several site Eco-Pagans, significantly the six who are closest to the Traditionalized end of the scale on my quadrant diagram in 'Section II:

Introduction': Jo, Jan, Oak, Jake, John and Millie.

For detraditionalized site Eco-Pagans spiritual growth was often part of a life changing activist experience: Dave explained that he had become "drawn towards Paganism" while at site B, so had made himself a Pagan staff and attended "a fair few Pagan ceremonies"⁵ (interview and field notes, 24/05/06). In comparison with other Eco-Pagans, his path had been unusual: From age 17 to 28 Dave "was a full on boy racer with the second loudest car stereo in the country", and had worked in factories for 22 years. He hadn't spent much time in the organic environment as he was always "[s]tuck in a factory or in a vehicle!" But he had been involved with the local Greenpeace group for six years before coming to site B, and soon after arriving gave up his factory job, which changed everything:

Actually giving up your paid job to do activism full time is a very big thing. If your job goes, pretty much your house, flat or whatever goes, and if that goes what do you do with your stuff? Your possessions go, so that's a huge thing to do protesting and environmental stuff full-time, to actually live it every single day of your life. [...] It's been the most amazing years of my life.

Dave was attracted to Paganism because he had met Pagans who were very "caring about the environment, about nature", but a "powerful energy and a very powerful presence" on the site was a significant factor in his spiritual emergence.

Spirituality Without Labels

Jo tried to create rituals that were suitable for "people that follow a nature path and don't call it Paganism". Some of those whom I identify as site Eco-Pagans resisted adopting the name 'Pagan', so prompting the question of why I still designate them as such. Participants like Rob and Ian felt that because "words carry great preconceptions" (Ian) naming something tended to limit it, but given the vagueness of the term they would acknowledge Paganism as a suitable label for core aspects of their spirituality. Debbie was aware of her ambivalence towards Paganism but her resistance was not to Pagan practice, which she enjoyed, or Pagan beliefs, which reflected her own. However, she didn't want to define her spirituality:

I have been, like 'Oh you are a Pagan', an all that, but I'm not putting a name to myself. [...] I don't put names to stuff. [...] I believe in Mother Nature, not as a God or a Goddess.

Debbie had known about Paganism from friends for well over a year when I met her, but for Ray it was still very new and the site B Land Blessing in October 2006 was his first such experience:

I'd never experienced anything like that before, we're all stood there in a circle, which meant something really big I know, the whole circle thing, standing in a circle with everyone, feels quite powerful [...] I cried at that one.

5 Dave was handfasted at a Pagan wedding ritual in November 2007.

Ray had "always been spiritual, about the love for the Earth" but he didn't "particularity have a religion" although he added that "Paganism is the closest that I've seen". His spirituality had become "deeper" since he first came to live on a protest site partly, he suggested, because he had "lived outside now, near trees" and through meeting "people that are more spiritual" and getting "involved in some of the Pagan ceremonies". Many Pagans find a name for a spirituality they already have, and Ray had "felt a very strong connection with the Earth" for many years, but had no name for the spiritual dimension of that feeling.

Lauren's experience was more complex, as for most of her life she'd avoided religion and had "decided there wasn't such a thing as spirituality". But when she began to visit the Twyford Down protest in the early 1990's, this began to change:

it was the first time I'd ever done chanting and drumming round a fire and I just loved it. Drumming and dancing and chanting round a fire! So fantastic, and spirit days and all that sort of stuff.

Although she later came to understand that these were spiritual feelings, at the time she "didn't want to know what it was, because it was something that I couldn't comprehend". But her sense of discomfort grew as a "sort of spirituality was waking up" and she became "really scared because I didn't know where to go with it [...] because the only thing I knew was Church of England or Catholics or whatever, and I'd really just dismissed the whole lot of it".

Lauren's spirituality grew out of a series of profound encounters with the organic environment which began at Twyford Down:

Twyford was such a *wonderful* piece of land. As you stepped onto it you just thought, 'What's happening to me?' And it was - I suppose it was in a way what first started it all but I couldn't cope with it. [...] the reason I think I had the breakdown was because it presented the real me to me and I just didn't recognise it or was able to cope with it.

Her experiences at Twyford were "just all too much" and she had a breakdown, but her spiritual sensibilities were to return over 10 years later when she arrived at site B:

When site B started it was to me exactly like Twyford Down. [...] I really wanted to go down there, and be part of this, [pause] but I didn't go because, I was scared. I was scared the whole thing would happen again.

Inevitably perhaps, Lauren started to spend time at the new site and one night her spiritual development "really crystallized":

I was in a bit of a funny state anyway, because I'd had this really chilled out, sitting at B [pause] and learning, I don't know, learning about the land again. Learning the power of the land? Something like that? And then, everyone had gone to bed - at least I thought they had - And I went down to the loo - the

compost loo. [...] at night sometimes I didn't bother to drop the curtain 'cos I was usually in a hurry [laughs]. And as I sat there, I saw what I thought was a man. And I didn't realise it was anything at the time - I just thought it was somebody peeping at me while I was weeing, and my immediate thought was absolute annoyance and anger that somebody could look at me [...] so when I stood up and then I realised that it wasn't, and it was just as though it was this figure - there was this man. It led out of the afternoons talking, so I was in that frame of mind and it was just this vision of this Green Man looking at me and it was as though it was just *calling* me, and I just felt [pause] frightened - shaky. [...] This huge figure, and I can only call it the Green Man [...] it had never really happened except that night when I sat at Twyford Down, [pause] I kind of had it. I call that one of my deep spiritual experiences sitting there that night when I knew I'd never be back there, just looking across that land, and I couldn't cope with that being destroyed.

As I was the only other person awake on site Lauren asked me to come and see the "figure in the tree by the toilet":

We went back there together and she saw the figure as not frightening but protective. She said she believed the Earth is drawing people to protect Herself. Bit like the 'Rainbow Warriors' (her phrase). I laughed as she said in the same breath that she isn't spiritual! (Field notes, 05/07/06, site B).

After Lauren and I talked about it the next morning, I noted that:

For her the figure represents a spiritual presence defending site B and crucially somehow bringing her a message. She was more freaked out that it *wasn't* a human and that it was a spiritual experience. [...] When she came to see me in the communal [space] she was quite shaken. [...] [But not by the thought of a peeping tom.] It was actually the idea that there was a spiritual dimension. She admitted to me that she was afraid of the whole idea of the spiritual (field notes, 06/07/06, site B).

Lauren later told me that it was this experience "that really kicked me off with this whole spirituality Earth bit", and inspired her to write a poem linking activism with "ancient" wisdom and the power of the Earth. A few weeks after the interview, Lauren told me that she had been to a political conference and found herself to be so sensitive to the space that she had to leave. Her rational mind had said "Oh, come on Lauren - You don't get affected by atmospheres", but she felt it so strongly she had to go. She explained this as the most recent example of a heightened sensitivity to place that had emerged since the night of the Green Man experience.

Given their practices and beliefs, it is appropriate from a religious studies perspective to count Debbie, Ray and Lauren as Eco-Pagans, even though they may not adopt that title themselves. We might call them 'proto-Pagans', but that implies that they will become 'full' Pagans when their spirituality matures, so is inadequate to describe this often carefully considered position. I use the alternative term 'edge Pagan', which more accurately describes this slightly uncomfortable place on a

border away from the centre ground facing an intimidating option, and carries the sometimes appropriate connotation of critical sharpness. The term edge Pagan can also be appropriately applied to several of the urban Eco-Pagans in the previous chapter who have moved through the centre ground of Paganism to somewhere nearer the edge.

PROCESSES OF CONNECTION

In his survey of wilderness spirituality, Ashley found that a sense of connection was most commonly cited as fundamental (Ashley, 2007), while my Eco-Paganism literature review noted a “sense of connectedness” amongst activists (Plows, 1998: 168). My fieldwork confirmed this research: Rob explained that his “connection with the earth” had become “a major part” of who he is, while Jan expressed it very explicitly: “That’s what Paganism is all about – connection with everything” (field notes, 11/10/05, site B). A comment made by an activist at site E tied the sense of connection with the theme of alienation discussed below (*Attitude to Urban Life*):

Sitting round the fire pit [...] explaining my research to Ian. Others chipped in. Ben said (approx):

"It's blatantly all connected. If you can't see that it's just because you're closed down - conditioned" (field notes, 06/09/06).

Several factors contributed to this sense of connection, including meditation, ritual, entheogens and the wilderness effect. Greenway claims that "both the psychedelic and meditation experiences ... closely parallel" the experience of the wilderness effect, and that such awareness seems to have the "capacity to open consciousness to Mind - that is, to the more natural flows of information from nature" (Greenway, 1995: 132).

Meditation

Many (7) participants used some form of meditation or contemplation. Rob learnt techniques from Vipassana meditation that showed him how "your environment shapes the way you think". He also used a less formal approach:

just spending time out in nature, just listening. Just looking. Not really thinking too much. It's good to kind of not think, just become, just let it flow though you I guess.

Jo described a very similar practice:

you just sit there and you just - if you give it a moment, peace - it will just come in and, it's like a wash that floods through you.

Debbie tried to explain the sense of connection that comes to her when she spends time in the organic environment:

you look up and look around you and you understand. I feel very honoured

that fact that I've been allowed to understand it and I've been allowed to see.

This understanding remains as she walks home afterwards:

I'm walking down the road and I've got a smile on my face. I understand everything, and other people walking past, and I'll have an even more of big smile and I'll go 'I understand this world we live in and you really don't have a clue do you?' [Laughs].

Debbie explained that this understanding could come from "[j]ust sitting" in any "[n]atural places, beaches wherever", but especially from "living in the woods".

When I asked Adam where he learnt his spiritual understanding, he told me that it was from "the land", sitting quietly and "the stone masons and wood workers". He added that if mediation means "doing without thinking" then he did "what you might call meditation all the time when I'm with the land".

Eco-Pagan Letcher also recommends "solitude, stillness and sensitivity" as a means of reconnecting with an organic environment (Letcher 2001c), and this simple technique of spending time quietly "sitting out" has a long history in Heathen practice (Blain 2001: 61-62; Richardson, 2007). Both popular literature (Ferguson, 1980) and academic accounts confirm my participants experience that meditation enhances sensory awareness, and thereby enables a deeper sense of connection. According to Greenway "[p]ractices such as mediation, when seriously undertaken, are explicitly designed to facilitate the arousal of nonegoic awareness" (Greenway, 1995: 133), while Braud states that:

Entering a state of relaxation and quietude helps reduce bodily and other distractions that ordinarily prevent the efficient deployment of attention [and allow us] to be fully aware and attentive to everything that happens with a 'beginner's mind' (Braud, 1992: 3).

Ritual

Six participants found ritual valuable (Jo, John, Oak, Dave, Ray and Debbie), but it was not very important for Ian, Adam, Jan, Rob, Jake or Millie, and Lauren disliked it. Simple rituals were much preferred by everyone, and even Lauren didn't mind something "very very basic". Nearly all the protest site rituals I observed took place at site B and were most often facilitated by Jo, who was also the one who found ritual most important. Jo found rituals important for "marking the Seasons [...] to appreciate where we are at in the year" and felt it was important to "keep it natural, and have the sort of natural things on the altar".

Most of those who were fairly new to Paganism found ritual very significant (Debbie, Dave and Ray). The first ritual at site B was a Land Blessing facilitated by Oak and Jan which Ray found especially powerful, and it was

probably the first time I connected properly with the - realised no actually, realising this bit of land is here and we're actually protecting it and saving it

and loving it.

For Ray the ritual was a process of connection with both those in the circle and the place itself. Millie likewise noted that it was "[n]ice because of the sense of us all being there in the community. Sharing something. [Were all] connected. The land and us were connected".

Jan facilitated the ritual purely for the benefit of other people as she found it unnecessary:

I don't differentiate between what we did in the circle and what I do on a ... quite a regular basis, so ... Just talking to whatever's out there. So I felt glad for everyone else. I didn't feel too different in myself, because I think I earth myself quite well, and I don't find it that different really.

Jan's daily practice consisted of a contemplative walk

I have a little walk up and down everyday to kind of keep the energy ... [...] I'm feeling quite cut off 'cos of the road, so I like to keep in touch with what we have got here, and so there's all the little things under the ground and they form a little network of energy or life or whatever you want to call it, and all little creatures, the grass and the plants, and there's different things out there and they're all alive in their own way and it's nice just to walk past them and say hello.

Ritual seemed to be largely irrelevant to those who, like Jan, integrated their spiritual practice so tightly with their everyday lives that specific rituals become superfluous. Rob and Millie only mentioned ritual briefly in interviews, while neither Ian nor Adam mentioned ritual at all. This attitude is exemplified by the experience of Motherwort, a "member of a local coven" who went to Lyminge forest during the protest of the late 1990's:

I asked them how they would feel about joining our circle to raise energy to protect the forest. Most were favourable, but one turned round and said very pointedly to me "we don't need your rituals, we live it every day, working to save the forest right here and now, if you want to help us come and live here too" (Roberts and Motherwort, 2006).

Protest site rituals were less varied than the urban variety, tending to use the simplified Wiccan structure that is common in public rituals, and were facilitated by experienced practitioners for a mix of Pagans, non-Pagans and edge-Pagans. This was true of a ritual at the G8 protest, facilitated by Starhawk, one at Climate Camp, facilitated by a Reclaiming Witch and all the group rituals at site B. My Paganism literature review suggested that protest site rituals emerged spontaneously and were often ecstatic (Letcher, 2002; Plows, 2001), but although I took part in such rituals at Twyford Down during the early 1990's, I found no evidence of them now. Pending further research to explain this change, I suggest that the comparative remoteness of sites like Twyford Down and Newbury encouraged ecstatic ritual.

This has brought some positive changes: Letcher noted that the Eco-Pagans rituals at Newbury “trampled the flora ... and scared off the fauna” (Letcher, 2001c), but all those I participated in during my fieldwork took care to minimize any adverse ecological impact.

Entheogens

Plows and Letcher refer to the use of entheogens by site Eco-Pagans to facilitate contact with nature spirits (Letcher, 2005: 557; Plows, 2005: 505), and four participants had found entheogens useful. Ian described himself only half jokingly as “a trainee medicine man”, and said he did “lots” of meditation using entheogens like “ayahuasca, extracted DMT, planted rue seeds [and] corn with ergot on it”. Jake explained how his early experiences with “hallucinogens” changed his “perception of reality as such and the way I thought about things”. These experiences presented him with a “beautiful [...] vision” that he had kept at “the back of my soul or whatever and it’s sort of driven me [...] that is what we’re trying towards”. Lauren sometimes smoked cannabis, and felt that “when you’ve got so much to learn and move away from this patterning that’s happened in your life, all your life, you actually need something like that”. Entheogens had also been important in Rob’s spiritual journey:

magic mushrooms [...] open these channels up and let you connect with nature in a way that, [...] perhaps you never knew existed before and er, gives you a real sense of how you’re connected with it [...] I can’t sort of underestimate the importance that that’s had on my, connection with nature. LSD as well, is particularly important. [...] Using substances to enhance your perception of the world is very important [...] [but are] by no means necessary - I’ve had these experiences without taking drugs at all [...]

As we saw with the two urban Eco-Pagans who had worked with them, entheogens can act as stepping stones that catalyse a deeper level of connection that makes them unnecessary. This was true for Jay who said he no longer used entheogens: “They’re my drugs now - birds, wild animals, trees ...” (field notes, 21/07/06, site D).

Life Experiences

Childhood play in the organic environment was very significant for many urban Eco-Pagans, and most site Eco-Pagans (10) described similar experiences: Rob’s sense of “connection with the earth” originated from childhood trips to the countryside while Ray said much the same, adding that he “always loved going to the beach or going to the woods”. This confirms existing research into activist motivation discussed in the *Ecopsychology* section of my ‘Embodied Cognition Literature Review’.

Other people had life experiences later in life that helped create a sense of connection. Jo said that childhood play in the garden was where “seeds were planted for my future love of the land” which later bore fruit: In her early 20’s Jo gave up her job to grow her own vegetables, and it was this experience of “sowing

the seeds and working with the land, and in weather and the environment" that inspired her Paganism. John had a long term physical connection with the organic environment because he had a "nomadic" lifestyle, and would often "just sleep out". Such experiences are widespread: Newbury activist Jim Hindle explained in his autobiographical account of the protest "how long walks on the South Downs ... brought about an awakening within", and a similar shift drew his friends Tami and Ceilidh to Newbury:

We had both awoken to the land around us and felt the calling ringing in our ears, as though we'd been asleep a very long time ... It was the same with Ed, who had had some kind of experience with the oak at Fairmile⁶ and had known, once he'd returned to his hometown, that he had to go back. Once you'd felt it, there was no mistaking it (Hindle, 2006: 100 - 102).

The effect of these processes of connection on an individual's being-in-the-world can be profound, and in some cases life changing. It is significant that the two participants who made the most marked life changes had also had the least prior exposure to the organic environment: Dave and Lauren experienced dramatic shifts that culminated in both of them selling up their homes and adopting a more nomadic lifestyle. Neither had experienced much opportunity to 'play' in an organic environment - as children or adults - before arriving at a protest site, so we might expect a greater impact from such an intense and unfamiliar encounter with the power of place.

The Felt Sense

Many urban Eco-Pagans became more sensitive to their felt sense through training in mainstream Traditions, so given that most site Eco-Pagans are detraditionalized, we might expect a less developed awareness of the felt sense. However, almost everyone sometimes recognises a felt sense, even if it is just 'butterflies' in the stomach, and site Eco-Pagans often refer to meaningful bodily feelings. Debbie described how she felt during the Land Blessing ritual at site B:

And [pause] you know when if something's so overwhelming if you got it in your stomach, and it's like [pause] I take a breath, and like 'Wow!', and I got really really emotional [...]. Overwhelming really. Really really overwhelming. I could feel it in here, in my stomach.

Oak has similar feelings during the ritual, especially when he invites Odin - the God he is dedicated to - into the Circle:

Like a fantastic beautiful shining light in your soul, sort of. [...] everything is just wonderful and great and it's just *in* you. Rather than, you know ... It's not an external experience. You're not viewing it and not feeling it. It's a very internal experience.

Although this feeling is felt "all over the place", it is a more focused in the chest, and

⁶ The Fairmile road protest site in Devon was evicted in January 1997.

"it's not a head sort of experience, it's a chest sort of experience". I then invited Oak to explore the meaning of this felt sense:

Light, energy, power. Um. Charged, fully charged, and light standing in a beautiful light, fully loved, completely safe and that sort of thing. Full on experience.

As we have seen (*Gendlin*, Chapter 3), the felt sense can often carry information that is not immediately accessible to conscious awareness, and this is apparent in Lauren's description of her last night at Twyford Down:

I knew that I would never be back at that place until it was all over and something was wrong. I didn't know what was going to happen but I knew I'd never get back there. And I cried almost all the way home, from Twyford Down to Winchester station to [home].

These examples are typical of Gendlin's description of a felt sense (inter alia, Gendlin, 1981), where someone experiences a meaningful bodily feeling and is - sometimes at least - able to become consciously aware of its significance. But in the previous chapter we saw many examples of a more complex process where urban Eco-Pagans 'tune in to' or 'communicate' with places, plants or trees using the felt sense (*A Sense of Nature*, Chapter 8). Lauren spontaneously experienced the same process when she saw a shaft of autumn sunlight illuminate a small Scottish waterfall:

And there was this one little waterfall, and when it started it was nothing but, suddenly the sun, just caught it, and it was just so alive with colours. It was pink, and then there was white - the middle central stream was absolutely white, this shining whiteness out of this dark water, dark and inky, on the other side there was this sort of brown and then round the sides a very deep blue - sometimes when you get a very deep brown it's almost blue - and then there was this green on the other side of the moss.

The waterfall was not only beautiful, but also eloquent:

And I just looked at it, and had this amazing feeling of just, sort of talking to the Earth. I can't describe it any other way - It was as though the Earth was just talking to me.

This is clearly a felt sense that she could understand consciously:

But standing on there, I also - you know - got this message about all sorts of things - I really kind of got sorted out. I just stood there, and my head just went through things, and it was as though logically, I knew what I had to do about X and me, and I knew what I had to do about the woodland and, I knew what I had to do about Y and Z and it was all there coming to me. And it was a feeling more than words. It was just - You know, my mind was making words out of the feeling. It was fantastic.

Her sense of "a feeling more than words" that her mind could make "words out of" is a perfect description of the process Gendlin calls Focusing, which some people do without training (Gendlin, 1981: 4), and can be life changing. Lauren's experience was indeed profound and powerful:

It was just, um, the only way I can equate it is like being, when I first found out I was pregnant - I just wanted to run down the hill and tell everyone saying 'I've just been spoken to by the Earth!' I mean I really felt that connected with this one site.

As Merleau-Ponty says "[i]t is the body which points out, and which speaks" and this "immanent or incipient significance in the living body extends, as we shall see, to the whole sensible world" such that we can "discover in all other 'objects' the miracle of expression" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002 [1962]: 230). Gendlin, who develops Merleau-Ponty's work, is clear that a felt sense can be one of recognition, and that symbols, which "includes anything that may have *the role of a symbol* (including things, persons, behaviors, and whatever)" (Gendlin, 1997: 91; authors emphasis), can evoke felt meanings.

Several researchers opine that intention is important to spiritual experience in wilderness (Stringer and McAvoy, 1992; Greenway and Taylor, 2006), and this is clearly the case here. Lauren explained the importance of her attitude, which includes an openness to spiritual experience:

I think it was because I was there all on my own, and I was the only person in the *whole* world that was sharing and was looking at it at that moment, and it was this uniqueness. [...] I thought 'This is just for me. This is just for me because I can't get anyone else. No-one else can share it. I've got to take this in me and tell other people about it'. [...] I liked it because it was a nothing bit of Scotland, it was an ordinary waterfall, but that particular a moment it was just so beautiful, And it might do it everyday, but I'm not there everyday. But I was that day. And it was the going to Coulpport, sitting there, getting wet, walking up there at that *precise* moment, and that's what I mean about feeling guided and doing stuff.

We can continue to unpack this experience by applying the enactive process model: Lauren has lived a long full life, so on my model her deep body - the source of Gendlin's implicit - will have a very rich sense of the world. This is inarticulate, and perhaps better understood as a source of *potential* knowing (see Chapter 5). The understanding that is implicit in this richness may never become explicit if it is not evoked by experience, but in the case of Lauren's waterfall a particular place at a particular moment *does* evoke some of that deeply embodied potential knowing: One day Lauren stands before a waterfall and its beauty, in that particular moment, calls forth an implicit knowing into explicit awareness. In an important sense she is "talking to the Earth", because the explicit knowing is co-created by Lauren and that particular place. Lauren is thinking with the place, and the ambiguity of that phrase is fortuitous: In a sense she is *using* the place to evoke her embodied knowing, but

on a more sophisticated reading Lauren and the place are thinking *together*, through the process of extended cognition. Both perspectives oversimplify somewhat, as to some extent they use the subject/object paradigm which this thesis problematizes, and it is clear from the enactive process model that at a more fundamental level 'Lauren' and 'the place' are aspects of one ongoing process. My embodied philosophy chapter could only begin to tease out the threads of this complex enactive co-creation of the world, but it is clear that it is intrinsic to the Eco-Pagan understanding of the sacred. We can never fully articulate this mystery because it is implicit, and thus we gain understanding of spiritual communion with the other than human world without diminishing it: A sense of the ineffable remains because the ultimate source of understanding will always remain implicit and mysterious, and yet it can be evoked by ritual, poetry or experiences in the organic environment. Because it relates to the experience of both urban and site Eco-Pagans, I discuss this complex relationship between the felt sense and spiritual understanding again in the next chapter, 'A "sacred relationship with world" '.

The Wilderness Effect

Greenway argues that “civilization is only four days deep” (Greenway, 1995: 129) and that even such a brief time away from 21st Century life is deeply transformative. To date the wilderness effect has only been noted in the context of extended wilderness trips, but ecopsychologists agree that “simply spending meaningful time communing with nature” (Shaw, 2006) is beneficial, and the full effect is a difference of degree rather than a difference in kind (Greenway, 1995: 132). We would then expect that long periods in less than pristine wilderness would have a similar impact to short, intense wilderness exposure. My fieldwork shows not only that the wilderness effect occurs at protest camps, but that it catalyses a spiritual experience that leads some protesters to describe themselves as ‘Pagans’. As we have seen this experience can be “a heavy shake-up: one's perception, dreams, perspective, awareness vividly and rapidly changes” potentially “to the point where people become more or less incapacitated when they return to their normal lives” (Greenway, pers. comm., 2006).

Although the effect was first noted on North American wilderness treks, there are many correlations with felt experience at a road protest camp. Although such spaces may have been culturally mediated, they retain certain aspects of true wilderness: Relative openness, no advertising, absence of most 21st Century technologies (flick-switch lighting, hot running water, instant heating, t.v. etc.), low tech. living spaces, etc. Before I pursue the connection, it is important to note that wilderness trips are generally focused on personal therapeutic goals and any human-nature connection is a bonus (Baillie, 2006). Further, as Shaw points out, there “is no guarantee that this process will lead directly or indirectly to environmental action” (Shaw, 2006). However, I am not suggesting that spending time in an organic environment inevitably makes us more environmentally aware, but that the wilderness effect helps explain many key aspects of protest site Eco-Paganism.

There are many obvious similarities between a wilderness trek and life on a typical protest camp. Most significant of these is the practical connection with the

elemental forces of nature. In my site B field notes of 27/10/05 I write:

Simplicity of life on camp allows us to attend more closely to our embodiment. It's also highlighted by the life itself – physical work, need to keep warm and attend to physical well-being⁷.

As Letcher says: “The very act of living out, however dependent on wider society for food and so on, puts one in touch with nature in a way that is real, not virtual” (Letcher, 2000). Living in a bender provides a much more intimate connection with the immediate environment which is why Ray doesn't "want to live in a house, ever again”:

in a house [...] you're just sealed off [holds hands up palm to palm in front of his head] from any - anything that could possibly connect with outside of it you know? Other than probably another box which is the television. Like you don't realise it until - well I didn't realise until I had the opportunity to live outside in a bender. [...] you hear the birds when you wake up in the morning and that's nice, [...] Sometimes you'll hear a wasp fly by or something [...] you kind of connect with what's outside of it, a bit more than you would in a normal home.

I asked Ian if it felt different when he was in the woods. He smiled and said:

Does it feel different? No, it feels different when I'm not - when I'm in a box or on a street. That's when it feels different.

Similar experiences are described in autobiographical accounts of road protest life. Newbury activist Jim Hindle describes how he

became accustomed to the sound of the wind in the trees at all times. It wasn't a thing I necessarily listened to, but the silence that fell whenever I stepped inside a building was eerie and disquietening. ... It was like being connected to a great river, the source of all life ... and years of separation between us and the Land were falling away like an old skin (Hindle, 2006: 70-71).

Research reviewed earlier concluded that the wilderness experience enhanced sensory acuity (McDonald and Schreyer, 1991; Beck 1987; Harper, 1995; Sewall, 1995) and this is apparent in Rob's interview. In the city he has to engage sensory filters to “block out information, to block out noise, to block out the chatter of things [...] going into you mind, because if not you'll go absolutely insane because there's just so much going on ...” On returning to a more natural space he would find the silence overwhelming and “it was so goddam quiet it almost hurt”, but this passed:

And it was only when you actually started to listen that you realised it wasn't quiet at all but the river was flowing, the wind was in the trees, the birds flying. All of these things were going on which we weren't hearing because we

⁷ I lived for three months (over winter) at this particular protest camp (‘site B’) and spent approximately another six months there part-time.

had these filters on. And I keep repeating it but it's an important point, because people do live their entire lives in an urban environment and they just don't get the connection, um they don't get that connection with nature.

We hear later that several participants were similarly critical of urban life, and Greenway comments that the wilderness effect can place "the individual in more or less severe conflict with [urban] culture" (Greenway, 1995: 128). Greenway doesn't discuss why, but a heightened sensory acuity and the sense of connection described above are likely factors.

Protest site life has one significant extra factor which a wilderness trek lacks: Those who live on site are protecting it, and this enhances the sense of connection. As Jo explained:

you're giving your life over to try and protect that piece of land, so you have a more intimate relationship than you would, somewhere else [...] you've got that bond that you're trying to protect it, and I think it knows that you're trying to protect it, and it's your land because it's your home as well, and it's the home of the people that you share your life with.

Most of the key aspects of the wilderness effect (see Chapter 3) correlate closely with lived experience on a protest camp: a sense of connection, well-being, major life changes, contemplative practice and community. There are clear explanations for those that do not strongly correlate: Social drinking is common on site, so I would not expect alcohol addiction to be alleviated; my participants were not on a trip with a fixed period, so major goals will be stated in different terms but were similar; sadly, there was never the opportunity to "climbing a ridge or peak in order to greet the sun"; finally, dream patterns were not considered in my research (Greenway, 1995: 128-129).

- *The Wilderness Effect: Freedom*

Greenway describes the sense of freedom felt by those on a wilderness trek: "For many the wilderness experience means release of repression – release of the inevitable controls that exist in any culture" (Greenway, 1995: 128) and protest site campaigners commonly describe a feeling of freedom. My site B field notes of 12/12/05 attempt to put it into words:

I can't quite describe it, but have an image of Camp [site B] as like a bubble, an enclosed safe, crazy-sane place. It's a bit like ELFS⁸ actually – that same feeling of liminality, of freedom to be who you are, of safety and possibility.

Visitors often referred to a camp as a place "of freedom" as opposed to the world outside (quote from a visitor, field notes, 12/03/06, site B) and Merrick, a protester at Newbury, explains how that feeling of freedom allows for self-expression:

Not all far-gone behaviour is actually craziness; a lot of it is the release of tension that, in the outside world, people would be too inhibited to express (Merrick, 1996: 80).

8 ELFS is a annual week long Wiccan camp. I have changed the name for ethical reasons.

Again my ethnography bears this out. In a discussion over breakfast, Jan, who had previous experience of camp life and had lived at site B for about two months said: "I feel free here. I'm back to being myself". Debbie, who had been at site B for about a month and who had also lived on site before, responded that being there allowed her to "be who I really am". She commented that her partner had ruefully said she had "the site bug again". Jan went on to say that on site she did things she didn't normally do because she's otherwise too shy, and added: "I don't know who I am. When I'm here everyone knows who I am and it's really affirming" (field notes, 14/11/06, site B).

- The Wilderness Effect: Connection

For Greenway connection – or reconnection – is fundamental to the wilderness effect: "When entering the wilderness psychologically as well as physically, participants most often speak of feelings of expansion or reconnection" (Greenway, 1995: 128). As we have already seen, a sense of connection lies at the heart of Eco-Paganism and is common to both urban and protest site groups, so I need not repeat my discussion of its importance. However it is clear that the wilderness effect is closely related the other processes of connection I discussed above, and like them is grounded in embodied knowing: Shaw explains the sense of connection at the heart of the wilderness effect as "an embodied visceral knowing that transcends the distinction between the inner and outer landscapes" (Shaw, 2006).

- The Wilderness Effect: Community

A strong sense of community is another key characteristic of the wilderness effect that is also fundamental for some protest site Eco-Pagans. Jo had "always wanted to experience community living" and thought "the community thing" was "excellent" while Ray told me that living on site was the first time he had lived in a "community" and had realised that "it's a better way for people to live". My field work noted that the alternative sustainable community aspect of protest camp living was central for Jan (field notes, 27/11/05, site B) and she and Oak later moved to a woodland community. Lauren sold her house in the Autumn of 2007 and bought land to set up something similar.

- The Wilderness Effect: Sense of Self

The wilderness effect creates a distinct sense of self:

People often are quite explicit about how their minds feel 'open' and 'airy' in the wilderness, as contrasted with 'turgid,' 'tight,' and 'crowded' in urban culture (Greenway, 1995: 132).

Anderson's field notes describe how living it felt to live on site: "I get a slowed down, rhythmic feeling in the woods and on the meadow, relaxed" (Anderson, J., 2004: 51). Site life gave him "a sense of possibility, a blast of fresh air, oxygen rushing to the brain. These protests ... are like stepping into a parallel universe" (Anderson, J., 2004: 51). My field notes regularly express very similar feelings: "Feeling about being on site: Lightness, sense of openness" (field notes, 1/12/05, site B: also see Chapter 7). I became especially aware of this sense when I left camp for a couple of

days for a trip to London:

On the tube I feel more enclosed, less emotionally open, more restricted. We talk about urban congestion. It's not just roads that are congested – it's psyches (field notes, 4/11/05, site B).

Later I expressed a similar feeling as I left camp to travel by train to London:

As I sat down in this warm, enclosed space I felt odd – slightly shocked somehow. Now a few minutes later, it still feels strangely alien. Straight lines hard consistent surfaces. Ordered space. I feel shut away. I remember sensing a similar difference between cycling and being in a car: on a bike you're connected, part of the space you move through. In a car you're enclosed in a discrete space. I think that's the key to the difference. [...] the inside and outside are less defined. Even in my bender it's very obvious what the weather is like! There are no doors, very few straight lines and no order. The space is more open, inconsistent, and fluid. Sometimes it has an organic quality inspired by the materials; my bender is a dome, shaped purely by the relationship between bent hornbeam and the space (field notes, 14 /11/05, site B).

Tuan (1974) noted how physical setting influenced perception, and suggested that the straight lines of conventionally constructed space requires different skills of perception than the organic complexity of a natural landscape . Given the complex relationship between perception and sense of self discussed in my literature review of embodied cognition, the phenomena Tuan observed will contribute to the wilderness effect.

- *The Wilderness Effect: Spiritual Dimensions*

All research into the wilderness effect concurs with Greenway that it has a "spiritual" dimension (Greenway, 1995: 128), and Key points out that there are "many examples" of spiritual experiences catalysed by wilderness (Key, 2003: 65). In fact the development of Eco-paganism amongst UK environmental protesters living in liminal temporary encampments is just the most recent manifestation of the spiritual power of place.

My literature review noted the importance of a sensual relationship with nature to some Pagans, and the wilderness effect helps achieve what Letcher described as "an embodied sensitivity to nature" which is essential if we are to "come to know the 'genius loci' the spirit(s) of a place" (Letcher, 2001c). All my participants linked their sense of connection with the organic environment with their spiritual experiences, and the main difference between site Eco-Pagans and their urban counterparts was in their relationship to cities. For most site Eco-Pagans the organic environment was essential to spirituality. This is apparent in much of what I have already reported, but Rob is typical:

I find it quite difficult to connect with my spirituality when I'm in an urban environment - It's only when I get out into nature ... and feel the energy

flowing through me and I have that connection [...] the only way to understand it is to be out there and experience it.

- Exceptions

Not everyone on protest sites showed as much respect for the places they lived as the Eco-Pagans, nor did everyone develop a nature based spirituality. Clearly the processes of connection do not influence everyone and other factors must come into play. Although I did not interview activists who lacked a sense of connection, some of these factors were apparent, notably the influence of alcohol at sites D and E:

It's great here right now, but Bob tells me it can change in a moment if the 'brew crew'⁹ turn up. This is a major factor influencing any wilderness effect (field notes, 21/07/06, site D).

On more established camps there is often very little that needs to be done and boredom often leads to alcohol abuse. This was also apparent at site E:

When I arrived I heard [reports] of a lot of drunkenness on site. This confirmed when I went over on Sunday morning to see 6-8 people drinking cider at 10 am. General reports of fighting, drunkenness and noise in the evenings. [...] Then in Sunday [night] things turned round: a fiddle player turned up and it was folk songs and tea round the main fire! Since then I've seen much less booze so things may be turning round (field notes, 05/07/06, site E).

Stringer and McAvoy noted four factors that inhibited spiritual experience in wilderness: Not enough time alone, not enough time in general to "see, feel and/or experience processes", "too large a group" and simply "not looking for spiritual experiences" (Stringer and McAvoy, 1992: 69). All these would be inhibiting factors at protest sites which are often chaotic, sometimes include large groups and attract people with no interest in spirituality. Greenway opines that *intention* - a factor closely related to this last point - is the key to how powerful the wilderness effect is and observed that many people "carry" urban culture into the wilderness, meaning that they resist entering into it psychologically (Greenway, pers. comm., 2006).

The Impact of Processes of Connection

- Spiritual Emergence

Three of my participants became increasingly drawn towards Eco-Paganism during the period of my research. Ray followed the typical pattern of finding a name describe in the previous chapter: He always had some sense of a spirituality that was rooted in a "love for the Earth", and had recognised Paganism as a way to express that feeling. Dave and Lauren are atypical in that this spiritual awareness emerged later in life, perhaps because they had very little opportunity to play in the organic environment as children. Although my fieldwork sample is too small to claim that this is more than a plausible hypothesis, it correlates with existing research

⁹ The 'brew crew' refers to mostly itinerant alcoholics who typically drink Carlsberg Special Brew lager which is 9.0% alcohol.

discussed in my embodied cognition literature review.

The wilderness effect had a fundamental influence on the emergence of an Eco-Pagan spirituality for these three people, and although wilderness researchers have noted individual spiritual experiences, this is the first time a fieldworker has observed the emergence of a complex 'nature based' spirituality in participants in any location. I arrived at site B within weeks of it being set up, so witnessed all the gradual changes that marked the spiritual growth of Dave, Ray and Lauren, and the latter's 'Green Man' epiphany. Because I was experiencing the spiritual influence of the wilderness effect myself during the same period, I had an embodied understanding of the process that I could interpret within an academic context. This unique combination of embodied understanding, thick ethnography and theoretical analysis has provided significant original insights into site Eco-Paganism. My research not only bears out Harvey's opinion that site Eco-Paganism tests "our understanding of what 'spirituality' might mean" (Harvey, 1997b: 3): It also demonstrates how spiritual experiences catalysed by processes of connection have helped create the sub-culture I call site Eco-Paganism. Letcher claimed that Eco-Paganism emerged from new-age traveller culture (Letcher, 2005), and my literature review describes philosophical, religious and political influences, but the wilderness effect is the real power that underlies all these subsequent social influences.

This dramatic example of the power of place helps explain several key characteristics of Eco-Paganism, including participants tendency to adopt the name because it reflects their existing spirituality, the emphasis on orthopraxy and eclectic spiritual practice. Furthermore, although UK site Eco-Paganism emerged from the 1992 Twyford Down protest (Letcher, 2005: 556), it is found amongst environmental protesters in other countries, notably those spending time in wilderness (Shaw, 2006; Taylor, B., 2001). Given existing evidence of the power of the wilderness effect to catalyse spiritual experiences, it offers the most plausible explanation for the emergence of site Eco-Paganism on different continents. Cultural influences are far less significant: Although Starhawk's work is influential amongst urban Eco-Pagans, it is largely absent from protest sites, which remain dismissive of mainstream Paganism.

- *Blurring Boundaries*

I found extensive evidence that processes of connection encouraged a recognition that "organism and environment enfold into each other" (Varela et al. 1991: 217), as described by the enactive process model. Rob described how he felt one evening in the woods when a deep realisation of environmental destruction came to him:

I felt like Gaia was really screaming out through me, saying please help me. Please help me, and like I started screaming myself and started saying these words. I felt so connected, so at one with the earth that this violence was being done towards me. Um, not me personally, any ego or anything like that, but me as in life, as in this whole unity which I'm connected with.

His identification with a sense of life itself, which is emphatically not his ego, is

particularly striking and recalls Greenway's conclusion that processes of connection "facilitate the arousal of nonegoic awareness" (Greenway, 1995: 133). As we have seen such experiences are not uncommon. Taylor found that "no small number of activists report profound experiences of connection to the Earth and its lifeforms" (Taylor, B. 2005: 47) while Eco-Pagan Jodie concluded that site life constructed "a different form of consciousness whereby a person a felt a part of nature" (Greenwood, 2005: 107).

- Motivation

Environmental campaigners are already committed to activism before they arrive on a protest site and this may have little or nothing to do with processes of connection. However, many activists who arrived on site for rational reasons soon became influenced by the power of place. Although all embodied cognition involves emotional engagement (inter alia, Damasio 1994 and 2003), Plows suggest that it is especially important for activists:

This is a crucial point in activist narratives as will be evidenced time and again in this chapter, the emotive, personal response - the facts are *felt* rather than merely understood (Plows, 1998b: 173).

Plows notes four aspects of this powerful emotional motivation, all of which tie in with my own research findings: First, "[s]ome kind of emotional, spiritual and/or aesthetic connection to *place*, for example, is often peoples' first action trigger" and as we have already seen, place is fundamental to Eco-Paganism. Plows found that a respect for "nature, for animals, for people" were also key motivation factors and this often "had a spiritual dimension". Relationships with other activists, "ties formed under (often) extreme conditions" were also important (Plows, 1998b: 208, authors emphasis), and this correlates with research findings on the close relationship between place and community noted by wilderness researchers.

Some activists are initially driven by rational reasons, but develop the kind of feeling for the facts that Plows describes. Kate, a Newbury activist quoted in Merrick's autobiographical account of the protest, is a good example:

I am starting to forget myself why I first went down, but I know it was rationalised by well thought out arguments against the Car Culture. Now these arguments have been replaced by a belief system, an irrational commitment to the land, to the trees and to the people who fight to save them (Kate in Merrick, 1996: 128).

Lauren's experience is very similar. Her involvement with environmental activism began when she watched David Bellamy's television series *Turning the Tide* (Bellamy, 1987):

I watched and I thought if only half of what he's saying is true, why the fuck isn't anyone doing anything about it? [...] I just could not believe it and that's when I started getting active with Friends of the Earth, CND - people like that.

Given that Lauren is a retired teacher and "a very logical person" this rational rather than intuitive approach is to be expected. But, as explained above, the influence of protest site life changed her outlook dramatically and after her meeting with the Green Man she concluded that:

what was at Twyford Down is living on - it's turned up at [site B]. This feeling, this love of the land, is growing so much in people now. And that is what will win through in the end.

Her rational, logical motivation has been transformed into faith in the power of love for the land. Rob made the same transition, and described the process explicitly:

I tried for a long time, kind of getting up every morning and sort of reminding myself of the ethical issues that were at stake here and you know, trying to each day re-establish my conviction to do something, and I find that trying to do that on a rational level was insufficient to to - you know - to fulfilling my aims and giving me that energy. And over the past kind of year - couple of years I guess - I've really discovered how much energy one can invoke from nature, on a very intuitive level, [pause] and that I believe that is far more powerful and far more, um, deeply ingrained within oneself than simply rationalising it, and that's fundamentally based on experience and based on living essentially, yeah.

For Rob, Kate and Lauren reason becomes replaced by something ultimately far more powerful; an embodied spiritual understanding of connection to place. This experience may be far more common than we realise: Jane, one of Shaw's informants, was on an anti-uranium blockade near the Kakadu National Park¹⁰ and explained how she "loved to observe the way the protesters from the cities down south would fall slowly into the rhythms of the land and be captivated by them" (Shaw, 2006). It is this embodied knowing of connection that inspires and motivates the 'folk' spirituality I've described as protest site Eco-Paganism.

- Attitude to Urban Life

Many of my participants (6) contrasted the connectedness they felt in the organic environment with what they perceived as the alienating effect of urban life. Lauren compared her old lifestyle with how she lived now:

It is very difficult when you come from this world, of time and meetings and writing things down. You get right out of touch with yourself.

After over a year living on sites, Dave concluded that when we "shed all [the] stuff" of conventional life "it definitely lets the spiritual side of yourself come out". Ray concurs with Dave's conclusion:

in this day and age it's just taken away from you [...] your mind's just filled with so much other stuff - well, crap basically [...]. No-ones really in touch with what they actually are or anything, or life. [...] And if you start talking

10 Kakadu National Park is situated 250km east of Darwin, in the Northern Territory of Australia.

about, you know, the wind and the earth and the fire and the stars people just start laughing at ya [chuckles].

Ian and Adam believed that this lack of understanding is endemic to Western life: Ian lamented that "We are bred not to get it", while Adam told me that we are taught "from the womb" that "this is the way to live", and social reinforcement is all around us "like smoke". Adam contrasted this "psychic pollution" with a sense of "peace" that comes from being "grounded" in the embodied way of knowing that he feels in his stomach.

The sense of connection Adam describes often had a practical expression. Previous ethnographies described different degrees of environmental sensitivity amongst site Eco-Pagans, contrasting the respectful "practical paganism" of Twyford Down (Plows, 2001) with the insensitive rituals Letcher observed at Newbury (Letcher, 2001c). My own ethnographic research, which was more extensive than Letcher's, concurs with Plows, and I observed elements of Permaculture, extensive recycling and considerable sensitivity to local ecology amongst protest site Eco-Pagans.

OTHER ASPECTS OF PRACTICE

- *Magic (Spell work)*

Some typical aspects of mainstream Paganism are less apparent amongst site Eco-Pagans, notably magic and practice that involves deities. Magic was only mentioned in two interviews: Jo explained that part of the reason she drew away from Wicca was that "magic was never really [her] thing", while Jake commented that it was not part of his practice. Only three protection spells were cast by site Eco-Pagans throughout my fieldwork, including one by me and one which caused considerable disagreement. Again the earth based/esoteric model helps explain fieldwork findings, especially in the context of Pearson's differentiation of "occult" "ritual magic" from the "'ordinary magic' of everyday life", which is concerned with "a connection to the Earth" (Pearson, 2007: 101). Her clarification is useful: Whereas "occult" magic is rarely practiced and often disparaged amongst Eco-Pagans, the 'ordinary magic' of connection is fundamental to both urban and site Eco-Paganism. It is this latter understanding of magic which Greenwood uses in her discussion of "magical consciousness", which as we have seen describes a form of embodied knowing (Greenwood, 2005).

- *Deity*

Very few of my participants worked with deity at all, and only Oak honoured a named pantheon deity. Jan did not like talking about *working* with a deity, and has quite a sophisticated understanding of the whole notion:

Well, I wouldn't call it work. It's, I just like to say hello, and you know. I don't know. Whether it's Her, or something else, or just the land breathing maybe, I don't know, but it's the same kind of feeling. But, I can call Her the Goddess to other people because they understand.

I asked her what she meant by "the land breathing", she explained:

it's the mushrooms underneath, and all the roots, and the trees intertwining underneath. I mean, in a wood all the trees have joined together and then you've got all these layers of different ecosystems - I think the whole thing makes a complete breathing creature, almost. Which is why, you know, land clearance is so dreadful [...] that is the whole breathing entity of which we should be a part, a symbiotic part, and we're not. That's where it all goes wrong, horribly wrong, isn't it? That's the Goddess, that's who I try and, I don't know, communicate with, talk to, sense, um. Yeah, but I felt wonderful when I was calling Her in and I think people understood what I was trying to say.

Jan was not particularly concerned with naming this phenomena as Goddess or ecosystem or both, partly perhaps because she thought that "we construct our own realities". What was important was her relationship to the breathing land and to her community. It is significant that when Jan invited the Goddess to the Circle at the Land Blessing ritual, she did not call to an unnamed universal deity - *The Goddess* - or a pantheon Goddess, but the local Goddess of that specific area.

John was emphatic that the power of the Awen came from an external force, but did not specify any name:

It's coming from the great God, the great Goddess, the Universal Architect, whichever tradition you come from, it's external. [...] It's not coming from you, it's coming from something you tap into and work through.

Jake was not "called to certain deities" and Jo had "never really done deity", though she added "to me it's the Old Gods and they're there, they're everywhere". Ray didn't relate to deity because he didn't identify as Pagan and none of my remaining participants mentioned deity, although they did talk about spirits, the Fairy Folk (Ian and Adam), or more diffuse notions of 'energies'.

- Ancestors

The ancient burial at site B was very significant for some participants, and ancestors were important for Jo and Dave. John's ritual focused on the burial, but significantly he did not mention it in his interview, while both Jake and Ray only mention the burial in passing. In contrast, the burial and ancestors dominated my interview with Dave, who repeatedly mentioned the spiritual importance of the burial:

The whole area is a burial site so how can you not be spiritual? How can you not be? You're living on a site of *ancestors*, you know [...] You know, you're living on top of this sacred part of the earth, how can you not be spiritual here? It it draws you in whether you like it or not, you know. They call out to you - our ancient dead.

Jo felt a similar affinity, and felt it was "an honour to work, I think, with [...] this burial place of an ancestor". The place in general was also important:

you build up that relationship with that land and [pause] and I feel now that that what keeps me here is that bond, with the ancestors and with the spirit that is around us here all the time.

Jo and Dave's fight to protect the site is inspired and supported by the ancestral spirits as well as the nature spirits of place, and as both are inherent in the land this relationship ties in strongly with the main theme of connection. In the previous chapter Cross Bones cemetery illustrated the importance of the cultural aspects of place, and it's significant that a burial site evoking a sense of the ancestors once again becomes a powerful place to think with. Sack's work explored this process by which places "draw together the natural, the social, and the intellectual" (Sack, 1997: 12), and he opines that this complex weave of cultural and physical features "enables place to draw together the three realms, and makes place constitutive of ourselves as agents" (Sack, 1997: 33).

- *The Erotic*

The erotic emerged as a theme amongst urban Eco-Pagans and was important for Rob:

I've also discovered the importance of like, sexual energy that pervades everything as well, it [...] but that's something as well that channelled and used for empowerment [...] I think it's everywhere, and it's a natural force that um, one can hook oneself up to.

No-one else mentions the erotic but there is an obvious correlation with the themes of connection, energy and empowerment.

SITUATED EMBODIED COGNITION AND THE WILDERNESS EFFECT

We have repeatedly heard how situated embodied cognition uses the immediate environment think with, notably in the case of Lauren's waterfall. Trocco, who led educational field trips into the Everglades National Park, described an example that illustrates how this process operates in a typical wilderness context. The group leaders found that the wilderness effect alone was rarely enough to shift the student's "years of cultural conditioning". But "when we associated a student's community, and eventually their individual identity, with planetary ecosystems, a kinship between the human community and wild ecosystems developed, and the student's bond with the earth was strengthened". The power of this approach became an "even stronger tool when the explication was able to touch an individual's psyche - as the similarity moved beyond metaphor" (Trocco, 1997). Trocco describes just such an occasion. Carolyn, one of the students on the trip who had some "tense emotional issues", was scared of entering the swamp. Trocco suggest that going into the swamp would be like going into her "psyche or consciousness: "perhaps understanding the swamp, can help you understand yourself". Carolyn agrees to "just think about it as a metaphor" and give it a try, but Trocco comments "I'm not totally sure it's a metaphor" (Trocco, 1997), hinting at a blurring of person and place similar to that described by the enactive process model.

Eco-Paganism typically draws on symbols grounded in “the earth and the seasonal cycles of the natural world” (Salomonsen, 2002: 14), like Jan's description of the Goddess as “the land breathing”. That is to say, Eco-Paganism is structured around practices that associate “individual identity, with ... ecosystems”. It is thus equivalent to the techniques Trocco used to shift cultural conditioning, so on Trocco's evidence we would expect Eco-Paganism to enhance the wilderness effect. I discussed the impact of belief systems on cognitive extension in Chapter 4, suggesting that the work of Stepp et al. (Stepp et al., 2003) explained why it was easy to resist the wilderness effect (*Metaphors as Scaffolding*). But their work may also help explain why Eco-Paganism would favour the wilderness effect: If belief systems can “interrupt feedback ... from the sociocultural and biophysical environments” (Stepp et al., 2003), then presumably they can also enhance that feedback, strengthening the cognitive extension described in enactive process model.

The experiences Trocco describes exemplify how the enactive process model works in practice, as do those of Eco-Pagan Rob's. Rob finds it “difficult to cope” in urban environments partly because “in an urban environment everything is constructed um, everything is based on ideas”. His difficulties are reminiscent of those described by other participants who found urban life alienating (see *Attitude to Urban Life*), and echo Barry's comments in Chapter 8. Situated embodied cognition in an environment Barry called a “sensory desert” (thesis: 133) drives Rob “a bit mad”, but in a more natural environment, his thinking is very different, and he “can kind of connect and open up those channels again”. In each case cognitive extension uses the local environment to make sense of the self and this may be life enhancing, as with Carolyn in the Everglades or difficult, as it is for Rob in the town.

Trocco and his colleagues utilised the powerful “kinship between the human community and wild ecosystems” (Trocco, 1997) and this relationship is clarified by my fieldwork and existing research. First, we know the wilderness effect can contribute to both spiritual experiences and help create community; second, studies show that “social dynamics” and “camaraderie” catalyse spiritual experiences in wilderness (Fredrickson and Anderson, 1999: 36; Stringer and McAvoy, 1992: 69); finally, we saw above how important intuitive, emotional ways of knowing - one aspect of situated embodied cognition - are for site Eco-Pagans. Trocco used this dynamic to break through the “years of cultural conditioning” (Trocco, 1997) and it works in a similar way on protest sites.

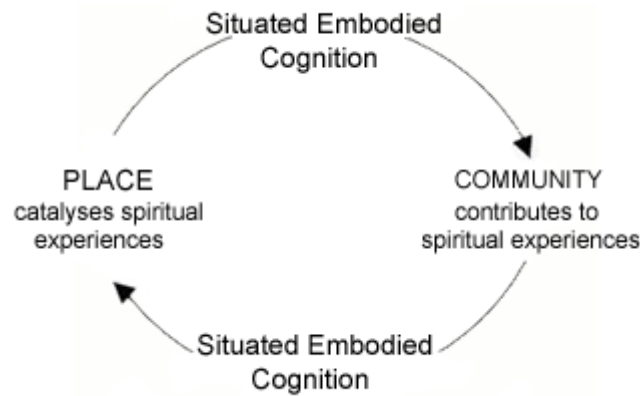


Fig. 5: Place and Community

The synergy of these findings is illustrated in fig. 5: the wilderness effect (place) catalyses spiritual experiences and helps create community which in turn reinforces those same experiences. I do not want to imply that place necessarily comes first: As we saw in the examples of the site B ancestor burial and Cross Bones cemetery (previous chapter), community reinforces the significance of place, thus contributing to its spiritual power. Of course belief and associated practices will be influential too, as discussed above (Stepp et al., 2003). All these interacting factors operate through interwoven processes of situated embodied cognition and are, *ceteris paribus*, in a self-reinforcing positive feedback loop.

Living on a protest site - or wilderness trekking - will also have significant effects on what Jackson describes as the "body-mind-habitus" (Jackson, 2006: 328) thus contributing to changes in one's being-in-the-world. Jackson claims that changes in our habitus can free "energies bound up in habitual deformations of posture or movement produce an altered sense of self" (Jackson, 2006: 328), which is exactly what the wilderness effect does. A fundamental aspect of this change in habitus is a deepening sense of personal embodiment which I describe above in terms of shifting awareness down the cognitive iceberg, shown in fig. #3 below, which is copied from chapter 4. I explained there that shifting consciousness down the triangle takes us into what Greenwood calls magical consciousness (Greenwood, 2005) which blurs the distinction between self and other, shown in the graphic by the gaps appearing in the side of the triangle, and thus enhances our sense of connection.

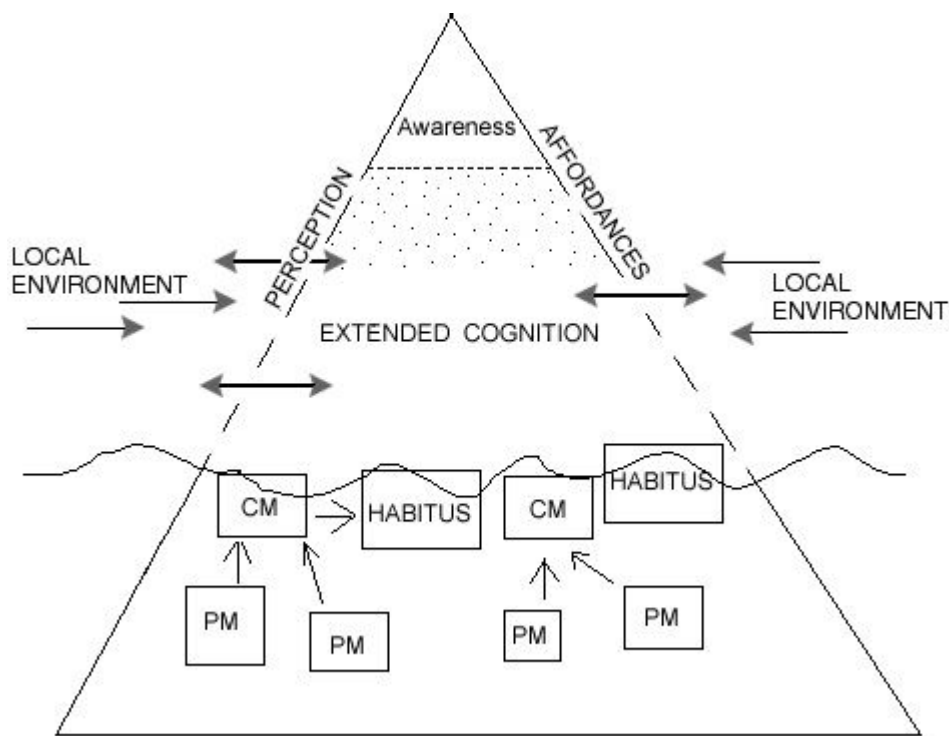


Fig 1: The Cognitive Iceberg
(Reproduced from 'Embodied Situated Cognition: A Synthesis')

It is this slide down the cognitive iceberg that explains the power of all the interrelated processes of connection I have discussed. As Greenway and others have noted, the wilderness effect brings "a shift from culturally reinforced, dualism-producing reality processing to a more nondualistic mode" (Greenway 1995, 131). Although "consciousness remains", it is no longer dominated by "the need-crazed egoic process (especially the making of distinctions)". As noted above (*Processes of Connection*), what remains is "a simpler, 'nonegoic' awareness" which can "open consciousness ... to the more natural flows of information from nature" (Greenway 1995, 132).

Conclusion

I have identified several processes of connection that inform and inspire site Eco-Paganism, each of which functions through situated embodied cognition. All these processes tend to deepen our sense of connection with the organic environment, can enhance a sense of community and personal empowerment and often alters our sense of self: They thus enable a communion with the genius loci which empowers activism, inspires spirituality and informs site Eco-Paganism. Mediation, ritual,entheogens and the felt sense sometimes facilitate site Eco-Pagans in gaining considerable personal insights from 'communication' with the genius loci within which they are enactively enmeshed. All of these processes can shift awareness down the cognitive iceberg making the enactive process of co-creating reality described in chapter 4 more transparent.

All the processes of connection were significant, but the wilderness effect was particularly important, catalysing a spiritual emergence for several people, and

playing a fundamental role in the development of site Eco-Paganism. This dramatic example of the power of place helps explain several key characteristics of Eco-Paganism including its origins, emphasis on orthopraxy, and eclectic spiritual practice. Trocco's work suggests that the practices of Paganism will enhance the wilderness effect (Trocco, 1997), and considerable evidence suggests that the processes of connection are mutually reinforcing (inter alia, Berger and McLeod, 2006; Fredrickson and Anderson, 1999; Greenway, 1995).

Greenway's evocative phrase that "civilization is only four days deep" (Greenway, 1995: 129) comes back to me, and I suspect it is even more fragile than that: Removing just some of the trappings of the 21st Century can profoundly shift our awareness and that powerful process inspires the spirituality at the heart of the protest movement. In the next chapter I weave together the strands of urban and site Eco-Paganism to reveal the full tapestry of a spirituality grounded in embodied situated knowing.