

Chapter 8: Listening to the Threshold Brook: Urban Eco-Paganism

"... contented so to look
On mists in idleness - to let fair things
Pass by unheeded as a threshold brook".
John Keats, *The Human Seasons*

This thesis developed from experiences as an urban Eco-Pagan that led me to believe that a "deep knowing of the sacredness of the Earth" emerged from "ecstatic Pagan ritual" (Harris, 1996: 153). In fact I had only glimpsed part of a complex process of greater subtlety that is ultimately more powerful than I ever imagined. Perhaps I was too entranced by the drums to hear the voice of the threshold brook, but my respondents had sat quietly and listened, just as I have now listened to them.

In general my findings are in accord with other accounts of contemporary Paganism, as urban Eco-Pagans show a pattern of simple practice informed by emotion and an embodied sense of the sacred. However, three obvious features are distinctive: ambivalence about identifying as 'Pagan', a lack of spell-work and the minimal role of formal ritual compared to mainstream Paganism. More significant is a relationship with the land or specific places that is catalysed by various processes of connection. This connection is often understood through a felt sense and can pattern a sacred relationship to the world.

Introducing the Research Participants

I interviewed a representative sample of ten urban Eco-Pagans, six women and four men, from a variety of backgrounds and locations. They included one Druid (Zoe), one Reclaiming Witch (Mary), three Shamans with different approaches (Barry, Gordon and Sekhara) and five very different eclectic Pagans whose were influenced by a variety practices of including Witchcraft, Voodoo, Shamanism, Druidry, Goddess spirituality, Buddhism and Christianity. Mark, one of these five, identified as a "shamanic pagan". Michael, Mark, Zoe, Sekhara and Sally are members of the Dragon Eco-Pagan Network. Four lived in London, two in the West country, two in the West Midlands, one in Essex and one in Derbyshire. Nine had been involved in protest activism while one has focused on community work. Seven of those nine had been active at one or more UK protest sites. In several cases their occupations are relevant: Barry Patterson and Gordon MacLellan worked in environmental education, Zoe worked with fair trade imports from Palestine, Sekhara and Michael practised spiritual healing, Mary was a counsellor and Jocelyn Chaplin was a psychotherapist. Participants' ages were between late twenties and early fifties, with most in the middle range. In most cases names have been changed but Barry, Gordon, Mark and Jocelyn have kindly agreed to me using their real names. My explicit fieldwork with urban Eco-Pagans between 2004 and 2006 is grounded in my own long term involvement - I have been an urban Eco-Pagans since at least 1990 - which provided insight and prior expectations.

SPIRITUAL PATHWAYS

Finding a Name

The first of several surprises was the common ambivalence about adopting the name 'Pagan'. Other scholars have noted that coming to Paganism is a process of *recognition* rather than conversion because "you don't become a Pagan; you find out that there's a name for what you already were" (Harrow, 2002: 113). Sally exemplifies Harrow's point when she says: "when I first found Paganism ... I thought, 'Oh fantastic I understand what I am'". This often profound insight brings a sense of 'coming home', but a newly identified Pagan's "hopes may be fulfilled or disappointed" (Harrow, 2002: 118), notably if the Pagan community seems to have a very different practice. Meeting Pagans who had different enthusiasms and lacked ecological awareness made many participants (8) uncertain about naming their own path. Was Paganism about a sacred relationship with the world or was it more about getting dressed up (Jocelyn and Mark) to join a "Gothy, jewellery flashing social scene" (Barry) down the pub (Zoe)?

While most researchers identify socio-cultural experience as the primary influence on Pagans, my research suggests otherwise. Ezzy opines that the Pagan 'coming home' experience results from an individual recognising "an integrated framework of thought and practice that incorporates a variety of more general ideas" (Ezzy, 2006). Social experiences are clearly significant, and Ezzy mentions "boring church services, dissatisfaction with repressive cultural norms, leaving home, relationships with boy/girlfriends etc." (Ezzy, 2006). His model loosely fits three of my participants: Mary came to Paganism via feminism, Michael through his girlfriend and Mark from books. But the other seven recalled a 'Pagan' spirituality in childhood and six cite experiences in the organic environment as fundamental: Emily grew up on a small holding; Sally remembered "feel[ing] the grass growing" when she was young, which "was the most lovely feeling, to feel attached to the earth", while Barry spent time in the countryside and "grew up" with a sense of "a presence in nature". Although all of them later read about Paganism, the first spiritual spark was the organic environment.

Although the cultural factors Ezzy outlines are significant, he, along with most other scholars (inter alia, Salomonsen 2002: Taylor, B., 2001: York, 1995), ignore situated embodied cognition. The enactive process model helps explain how playing in the organic environment can inspire spiritual experiences: As we have heard, embodied cognition uses the immediate environment to think with, and this process is enhanced when we can "use all the senses directly, without other people intruding or mediating that experience", so that an "embodied sensuous relationship with nature" can be afforded (Macnaghten & Urry, 2000; 170-171). This finding also confirms previous research that childhood play in the organic environment encourages adult environmental awareness (inter alia, Cobb, 1977; Wells and Lekies, 2006).

PROCESSES OF CONNECTION

Connection

Almost all participants talked about the importance of place and the land (9), which was understood as sacred (4) and healing (6). They spoke of having a "sacred relationship with world" (Zoe), loving or deeply connecting with nature and/or the land, and how they celebrated and appreciated relationships with specific places. The so-called Pagan 'Sacred sites' were unimportant to urban Eco-Pagans, and several commented that they no longer (or never) had the feeling that they must "find some ancient sacred site" (Gordon). Those who mentioned them at all felt that the importance of sacred places was "over estimated" (Jocelyn). A consistent theme emerged that different places are special for different people, and potentially "[e]very bit of land is sacred" (Jocelyn) and "wherever you are in the world is worthy of celebration" (Gordon).

Although every bit of land is sacred people felt very attached to particular places. Emily felt she was "indigenous" to an "actual patch of land", while Mary's sense of "the Land" was grounded in "that bit of Land down there that I look at everyday and is so beautiful". This connection was rarely expressed in the abstract: The sacred is "about my locality" (Zoe); it is being somewhere that woos you "to lie down on the ground and hug it and stroke it. Just that feeling of being in the right place. [...]" Where something in me, my spirit, but more than that, who I am, in my body needs to be in that place at that moment" (Sally). Sally commented that focusing on a particular place (Cross Bones cemetery) was very helpful in making a more general connection: "I find having a focus attaches me to everything really". Thus an intimate relationship with somewhere specific enables some urban Eco-Pagans to sense sacred relationship in itself:

Paganism is [...] about making sacred relationship with the world that's around you. [Pause] And that could be with the spirit of your house or it could be with the dandelion in your drive or the tree or the old lady who lives next door to you (Zoe).

Just as the tiniest fragment of a hologram holds a perfect image of the whole, so a relationship with the "dandelion in the drive" or "honour[ing] the little weed in the garden" (Jocelyn) can pattern a sacred relationship to the world.

The Threshold Brook

The fundamental importance of this communion with place and the wisdom it can bring is perhaps best expressed by Barry:

[I]f you have a little threshold brook¹, if there's a little stream like this running through you garden, everyday you get up and you go to work, it's just there, it's the background. You're not giving it any attention. That threshold brook is life passing you by, it's a source of delight to the sensitive soul like Keats. And yet the accountant, with his head in the cloud, and the deadline and a horrid commuting journey in the car through the rush hour traffic,

¹ The phrase "threshold brook" is from John Keats' poem in *The Human Seasons*: "Fair things pass by, unheeded as a threshold brook".

doesn't pay any attention to the threshold brook. And their life is impoverished as a result. [...] The threshold brook is there. Now how about I actually spend some time with it? How about I actually show some appreciation to it? And how about one day, after maybe months or weeks or however long it takes, maybe how one day no matter how cynical or jaded or sceptical or clever, or over analytical I was, that one day this special brook actually did speak to me. And told me what I needed to hear. And then I got up from sitting by the threshold brook and walked back into my world a different person. And that blessing that comes through threshold brooks, using that as a designator for that kind of experience, [pause] then that is a very healing thing, and if everyone were doing that then we'd all have more respect, and we'd moderate our behaviour and we'd get on better.

Learning to listening to the threshold brook takes time. Michael told me:

For a long time I was only interested in human activity then slowly came to notice things - or take extra notice of things - maybe that's the key - I started to take extra notice of things and I tried to get closer to the animals and the birds.

An important part of his approach "is not to use the mind [...] so that I can feel rather than think".

Healing

Barry describes the threshold brook experience as "very healing", and most (6) of my participants made specific reference to the healing power of place, but I will focus on one particularly rich example. Sally lives in London and is regularly visits Cross Bones cemetery, an unconsecrated burial site that was primarily used to inter prostitutes from Medieval times. For Sally "Cross Bones is a really happy place [and ...] a really healing place and I will always go there if I'm upset". Cross Bones has become a sacred site for several London Pagans, and "when the bombs went off in London in July the other year, we did a little ritual at Cross Bones. It feels like a real place to go with your pain or your grief" (Sally).

The Urban Environment

For many participants the power of place is apparent in urban environments, and nearly all my participants said the city was special, or as sacred in its own way as the countryside. For Sekhara "[t]he city is a place of power" and Jocelyn spoke of the "incredible ancient energy" of London. Others noted that human beings *are* nature: Michael lived in London and is aware that "[t]here's nature all around me - People". For urban Eco-Pagans anywhere can be sacred, and it "doesn't matter if you're in the city or the countryside" (Zoe).

Not everyone celebrated the human constructed world, and Emily preferred "being away from things constructed by humans". Barry was more ambivalent, and though he recognised the value of urban environments, was concerned that the city can easily become "a space built from symbols, a virtual reality, rather than physical structures & patterns of relationship" (Patterson, n.d.).

Ritual

My literature review explained the importance of ritual for Pagans, so I was initially surprised that it apparently had a low priority for participants, with half saying ritual was unimportant or marginal. Gordon rarely does "formal rituals" and believed that it is "too easy to get caught up" in "big rituals [...] to save the Earth" which actually distract us from working actively for change. Sally did not particularly like ritual, and added that "[i]t isn't really the way that I connect", while Mark did "what would probably be called a ritual, but a lot of the time I don't see it as such". However ritual was part of Zoe's everyday life, as she would usually bless her food, becoming aware of "all the webs and strings of association and life and death" around it. Her rituals could sometimes be quite "elaborate or formal", but must be local. Although *formal* ritual generally wasn't important, informal ritual practice was, and my participants enjoyed "spontaneous" expressions of spiritual feeling (Sally); Gordon created "whatever we need at the time" while Sekhara's rituals were "impromptu and [...] dr[a]w in all kinds of stuff".

The lack of formal ritual is not surprising given that urban Eco-Pagans are 'earth based' Pagans (Harris and Welch, 2006) who tend towards spontaneous, unstructured rituals. Eco-Pagan practice contrasts with Greenwood's ethnography of mainstream Pagans, which found that "there was more emphasis on ritual ... than a connection, or interest even, in the environment" (Greenwood, 2005: 175). A comment from Mary is apposite: "When I do ritual it's Wiccan. [...] That's what I do. But what I *feel* is more amorphous, Pagan, love of the Land". The practice that Mary designates as ritual comes from the Reclaiming form of Wicca, so emerges from the esoteric current. Although Reclaiming have removed the "sexist crap" (Mary) from Wicca, the "'unclean' heritage lines" (Salomonsen, 2002: 94) are not so easily cut. It is notable, then, that the amorphous - and embodied - *feeling* that underpins Mary's practice is more earth based than the more self-aware and formal ritual.

Dance and the Erotic

Dancing was part of Gordon's daily ritual practice and was fundamental to his spirituality:

It's a really big part of who I am and how I express myself. And um, and, I'm [...] a very sort of sensual physical person. And, dance is the best way [pause] of expressing that.

Dance "draws you into a different sort of passion" that "fills you and it shakes you and um, [pause] makes you complete - makes me complete. Like the aftermath of good sex. It's that sort of- it's a deep sensuality".

For both Gordon and Zoe the erotic knowing of dance connected and communicated in a way words cannot. Gordon's communication with spirits and deities often used dance, which is an ideal medium for a being "who doesn't really communicate through words", and we have heard how linked dance and passion were for him. Powerful emotion runs like a stream through Zoe's interview. She explained that her

connection a place, animals or trees was in her heart and she thought it was "very important [...] to respond emotionally, really emotionally to [...] what's happening to our world [...] [a]s well as cerebrally". Later she described leaving a special place for the last time as "like leaving a lover or a good friend". She expressed how both feelings and connection come together in ritual dance:

Adrian: Do you feel your body has a particular role when you're connecting to a place?

Zoe: [...] If I'm in, ritual, the walking, the walking of the Circle. [Pause]. The movement that I choose to make. The offering of something. The movement in my offering. It's like, it's a dance - It's like - It is like making love to a place. It's a very, conscious, bodily, sensation of the way my body moves in that place. [...] it's like my body takes on, a different way of moving if I'm in a sacred place or, you know a landscape that I'm consciously trying to honour or make ritual in. Um, so it's like a dance. [Pause]. It's a different way of moving.

Mary seeks that same passion in her rituals, but unfortunately the local 'Erewhon Pagan Group'², who she occasionally worked with, "don't get it. They're not ecstatic pagans. They're cerebral pagans and they do this ritual - that's sort of 'now we do this and now we do that and then we'll have a little reading about the meaning of the Circle'³ and all that. But I want to get out of my head - it's the ecstasy, you're losing yourself in the dance in the chant, just being completely out of it". Her comparison of "ecstatic" and "cerebral" pagans correlates very well with the distinction made earlier between earth based and esoteric Pagans (Harris and Welch, 2006).

When Mary explains that ritual is "like sex" it becomes clear that this is more than a simple analogy. In ritual:

"[y]ou build it up and you build it up, and there is a sense of the energy building and you have to peak it and you have to let it go, and when you let it go you know the ritual is over [...] [The 'Erewhon Pagan Group'] have these rituals where you get to the end of what's planned, and it's still unsatisfying. And it is a sense in you body of 'I'm not ready to finish yet'. It's like sex that's got half way and then you go off and make a cup of tea and come back and have another go but you never actually get to orgasm or you sort of half get there and then you lose it and you go away afterwards feeling sort of ... twitchy. A ritual that raises power without sending it off makes me twitchy [...] After a cone of power your body feels different to how it felt before and it's that post orgasmic, Ahhh! Now I can go home. Well, we can feast or whatever."

Jocelyn talked about the power of the "true erotic that's in the earth itself" and the importance of "pan-sexuality":

Pan-sexuality being an ability to experience sexual energy and sexual

² The name of the group has been changed to preserve confidentiality.

³ Mary later clarified that she meant the meaning of the Festival the circle was celebrating.

connection with all kinds of beings, not just with the partner who you happen to be sleeping with. I think that's a very important part of Eco-Paganism in a way, because it also means you can love nature, um, at an erotic level as well as at a heart level and a gut level.

Her words echo ecofeminist themes discussed in my Paganism literature review, especially Eco-Pagan Starhawk's injunction to "love nature ... carnally, with our meat, our bones" (Starhawk, 1982: 143). Jocelyn later explicitly ties this theme to my thesis:

I suppose there's something about, not just being embodied wisdom and embodied knowledge that comes, um from other parts of the body, it also comes from the sexual, the sexual energy, part of the wisdom, part of the knowing.

Before concluding this section, I note that three of the four participants who spoke in terms of the erotic were women and the fourth is a gay man. Even allowing for the slight gender imbalance of my interview group (six women and four men), this may be significant. I return to this topic in my fieldwork overview, 'A "sacred relationship with world" '.

Magic (Spell work)

Half of my respondents did not mention spell work at all, and those who did were often critical, like Jocelyn who spoke of those who practice "dressing up and [...] high magic." Mark also talked about spells in a critical context when describing people who do not grasp the ecological element of Paganism for whom "[i]t's more a concept of somebody, casting spells and um doing rituals and wearing the clothes as opposed to a Witch". He does do spells if the need arises, but they are "just part and parcel" of a wider practice. Mary provides the very cogent comment that it was Hutton's work (Hutton, 1999) that explained to her "why we're using an essentially magic tradition, to worship the Goddess and to express a, a spirituality that's to do with the land". Hutton explains how tightly the notion of magic is tied to esotericism, the same tradition of "high magic" criticised by Jocelyn, and how esotericism fed into contemporary Paganism via Wicca. Thus the earth based/esoteric model helps explain the initially surprising fact that magic (as in spell work) is hardly mentioned.

The magic that urban Eco-Pagans disparage is the "occult magic" (Pearson, 2007: 101) of "control and manipulation" (Gordon Melton, 2002: 173). But when they do practice magic it is usually the kind of "ordinary magic" that enables a sense of connection (Pearson, 2007: 101). One recent example illustrates this well: Shortly after the announcement of a collapse in many honey bee colonies, a message was posted to the Dragon Network listserv suggesting members join in an "Appreciation of Honeybees". The message originated from Arizona Shaman Jade Wah'oo Grigori, who explains the spell:

... move your awareness into that of appreciation. Perhaps meditate upon

someone for whom you have appreciation and gratitude, an event that stimulates a sense of deep gratitude. When this is a felt-sense, a palpable experience within your body ... [d]raw into this state the image of honeybees ... how they sound, their buzzing about, their beauty and grace, the wonders of honey as a food and as a wonderful sweetener of life! Feel that joy rushing through your body as you contemplate the honeybee (Dragon-network listserve, 2007).

Intrigued by Grigori's references to the felt sense, I contacted him and asked if he was using Gendlin's work. He replied that he didn't know of Gendlin or Focusing, but was "sure it is a form utilized by many, as it *works*" (Grigori, pers. comm., 2007; authors emphasis). Grigori's reference to the felt sense is significant, as I identify this technique as fundamental to how Eco-Pagans connect with place. The power of this approach is apparent in my interview with Zoe: When I asked her about this spell she responded that "it was very fulfilling" and she "could really feel [...] a very full heart feeling - Wow! You know a sense of wonder and appreciation".

Meditation

All participants practised some form of meditation. For Barry meditation was a "primary process" for being self aware and "unconditioned", while Jocelyn found it enabled her to be more sensitive to "the energies of nature". Sally practised a lot of meditation during a year long Priestess training, and it really got her "attached to the earth":

getting up really early and just sitting still, really focused my mind on what was happening outside and I would hear the crows, and they'd get up at a certain time every day and then when the clocks changed they weren't there any more 'cos obviously they were still doing the same thing weren't they, and it really disturbed me I thought, 'Oh I feel all' ... You know. It was that really. Doing that for a year, really kind of made me more aware of the web, I suppose I would call it the web of life. Made me really aware of that.

Once again we hear how our "being-in-the-world is bound up with the immediate environment" (chapter 4: PAGE). Meditation functions as a process of connection, as it focused Sally's awareness on the equivalent of Barry's threshold brook, fine-tuning her sensory awareness of the organic environment and fundamentally shifting her embodied relationship to "the web of life". Her training had a profound long term impact, and when Sally refers back to it later in the interview she suggests that it may have made her body much more sensitive to significant places (see *A Sense of Nature*).

The Felt Sense and Somatic Modes of Attention

Bado-Fralick claims that Wiccan training and initiation cultivates what she calls the "body-in-practice", a phrase she treats as equivalent to the 'somatic modes of attention' described by Csordas (Bado-Fralick, 2005: 130). Wiccan training enables the witch to "regain the body as a maker of knowing ... through engagement of the

body-in-practice" so that they can learn to "how to listen to their bodies" (Bado-Fralick, 2005: 80). Given the link between Wicca and Reclaiming, it is not surprising to find similar processes in the training of a Reclaiming Witches, who learn to "see, hear, feel, touch and taste with the inner senses" (Salomonsen, 2002: 177). By working with "inner pictures and feelings" Reclaiming Witches communicate with what the Tradition calls "Younger Self" (Salomonsen, 2002: 177), the emotional body/mind which operates largely outside conscious awareness (Salomonsen, 2002: 137) and parallels what I call the deep embodied self in chapter 4. Druidry, which also has close links to Wicca (Shallcrass, 1996: 69), exhibits the same pattern: Druid Orders offer training in mediation and visualization, and work with the Awen,⁴ which "go[es] thorough your whole body" (protest site Eco-Pagan Druid, Jo, 17/06/07). Many Shamans also learn to listen to the body: Gordon writes of how the physical ecstasy of dance connects him to a "world that thinks" (MacLellan, 1996: 147) while Barry explains that a "conversation with a tree is first and foremost a feeling in your body" (Patterson, 2005: 136). Shamanism however, is more diverse than Druidry or Witchcraft, and some practice, for example Sekhara's, is less embodied and more psychologized.

Notwithstanding Bado-Fralick's preference, Gendlin's theory is more useful than Csordas's notion for discussing this common process. I have already compared Gendlin and Csordas's models, and explained how we can describe Focusing as a somatic mode of attention that trains the practitioner to listen to the felt sense ('Embodied Cognition Literature' review and 'Research Design and Methodology'). I conclude that my participants, like Bado-Fralick's and Salomonsen's Witches, listen to their bodies and become aware of a felt sense, although none of them were familiar with Gendlin's work. The felt sense is a fundamental process of connection, as this form of embodied knowing plays a key role in how Eco-Pagans relate to place: In *Embodied Situated Cognition*, below, I explain how the felt sense enables Eco-Pagans to build these intimate relationships.

OTHER ASPECTS OF PRACTICE

Deity

Practice that involved deity⁵ brought another surprise, as it was less significant than expected. My literature review suggested that most contemporary Pagans "devote themselves to one or more gods or goddesses" (Cowan, 2006: 179), but while most participants worked with or worshipped deity some of the time, it seemed to be a fairly marginal practice.

Michael said emphatically "I don't work with any gods or deities. I don't disrespect

4 The Awen is a Druid term that refers to divine bardic inspiration and is often slowly chanted during Druid rituals (Bowman, 2002).

5 Mainstream Paganism - especially Wicca, my own background - often refers to "working" with deities and this was the terminology I used in my interview question. It was only when a site Eco-Pagan queried the phrase that I reflected on my usage and I now conclude that it may have emerged from the esoteric current discussed earlier, although this remains inconclusive. None of my urban respondents commented on my use of the phrase and most (7) spoke about "work" or "working" with deity or spirits so I continue to use these terms here.

them, but I just don't ask them or call to them. [...] I work only with the Earth". Zoe "[r]arely" worked with deity and although she was "a bit intimidated by the idea of deity", she did "have a relationship with a couple of our native gods and goddesses". Sekhara said deity work "doesn't seem like a thing I need to put an emphasis on". She worked "a lot with local spirits" including the Thames as the "spirit of London", but not with "what you call your serious big scale deities". Brigid was Mary's "home deity", but she did "work with" others who she thought of "more as Saints. You have St. Christopher if you're going travelling and St. whatever if you need a parking space". Brigid, however, was quite different. Brigid was "not just [...] part of the pantheon", and in fact for Mary, Brigid was understood "not so much as a sort of person, but just as ... Land". Although Mary would sometimes anthropomorphize the Land "because it makes it easier", she was generally critical of this approach. As we heard above, Mary would sometimes celebrate with the the local 'Erewhon Pagan Group' who invoke the "Lord and the Lady" in their rituals. She noted that "there's a sense that they're invoking the Lord and the Lady as people [...] rather than the Land. For me, you don't have to anthropomorphize it like that." This "very anthropomorphic devotional stuff" was what Mary learnt when she started in the Craft, but this had become quite alien to her and it was the "Land as sacred that really informs my spirituality and my activism". Mark was eclectic but worked "[m]ainly with Egyptian" deities because Egypt had "deep significance". In a sense this is fairly arbitrary because for Mark, as for many Pagans, "[a]ll aspects of the Goddess are still the Goddess. All aspects of the God are still the God". Pagans "worship nature [...] and the Goddess and the God are physical and spiritual representations of what is actually there".

Urban Eco-Pagans tended to work with a few *local* deities who are not part of a pantheon, and while this is not true of everyone, it was a common tone across their spectrum of relationships to deity. Jocelyn's feeling that "the idea of worship is a bit hierarchical for most Pagans", although perhaps not accurate of mainstream Paganism, seems to reflect urban Eco-Pagan practice. I noted in my literature review that mainstream Pagans rarely refer to local deities except in the case of those related to 'sacred sites'. In contrast, urban Eco-Pagans not only often have a relationship with local deities, but don't especially venerate those places commonly designated as 'sacred sites'.

Uncommon Aspects

For the sake of transparency I note topics which were mentioned briefly by a few participants. Three people mentioned chakras in passing: Sekhara described how she would travel to the Lower world via her "base of spine Chakra", and Jocelyn suggested that loving nature "at an erotic level as well as at a heart level and a gut level" is like "letting the energy flow to all chakras". Two people mentioned entheogens, but they didn't play a significant role in their current practice. Sally noted that wherever we are in London we stand on bones, and this link to "ancestors and how people go back and back" was important, partly because she needed "to be able to tap into that to look at the future as well". Zoe also mentioned that she will sometimes get a "sense of, my ancestors or the ancestors of the place being around me".

EMBODIED SITUATED COGNITION

Situated Embodied Knowing in Spiritual Healing

Although I adopt Gendlin's model overall, two of my participants gave clear examples of what Csordas calls somatic modes of attention. The spiritual healers Csordas researched would often get a feeling that provided information about the healing process (Csordas, 1999: 151-152), and Mark experienced the same phenomena in his Reiki practice:

I would feel a physical effect in my body where that person was having their energetic problems [...] say I got a pain in my kidneys, because that person was having a pain in their kidneys - without me, obviously questioning them, knowing anything about them. My body would have a physical reaction to what it was experiencing on an energetic level from that other person.

Mary described the same kind of experience with "hands-on healing":

if I've got my hands on their shoulders and suddenly my shoulders felt really sort of hunched and tight, then that's a sign to me to sort of move their shoulder blades back and free up their shoulders.

My methodology chapter described a Focusing psychotherapist using very similar experiences (Solomon, 2006: 9), and I noted in my 'Embodied Cognition Literature Review' how Focusing can train people to use somatic modes of attention. Mary was taught that the first stage of healing is to "tune in to the person", and to do this "[y]ou put your hands on their shoulder and just think 'What am I feeling?' " The parallel with learning Focusing, which begins with gently asking yourself how you feel, is unmistakable (Gendlin, 1981; Cornell, 1996).

What is particularly interesting is that Mary uses the same process to "tune in to" trees and places:

So that's how you do healing. You feel it in your own body - so I think in trees, I feel in my body a different feeling which I assume to be from that particular tree. And sometimes in places generally. Sometimes I just get a feeling of a place. The feeling is how it makes my body feel. [...] And this is the same as doing healing.

Mary repeatedly links her felt sense of trees with her healing, which suggests that learning hands-on healing helped her to learn to attend to her felt sense more generally, though Salomonsen's research (Salomonsen, 2002) suggests both may be grounded in her Reclaiming training.

A Sense of Nature

Nearly all my participants described experiences of a felt sense in their spiritual practice. Gordon notes that rather than following the traditional dates of the Pagan

Wheel of the Year⁶, he senses the "changing pulse" of the seasons, while Jocelyn senses the very subtle "vibrations of the tree". Emily likewise has "quite a strong sense of tree species" and some plants give her a feeling with a very specific meaning. She describes how "if I meet ivy I have a kind of a sense of that's a question to me to reconnect with my motivation". Barry has a highly developed felt sense of plants: During one section of the interview Barry explained his animist "pattern of consciousness", and I asked if there was a physical sense associated with this pattern:

Barry: Definitely. Absolutely definitely. [...] when you said the physical sense, and I focused there and I went there, I moved into that, I turned the volume up on that and I put my awareness into that, and what I got was a sense of embodiment which was much richer and more strange than your normal body awareness. Um, and so in a sense what happens is the hawthorn buds about to burst into May blossom became a physical sensation within my body [...] You know what I mean?

Adrian: Kinda. Whereabouts in the body?

Barry: OK. I'll do hawthorn buds. Oh, yeah, there is a practice I do that's related to this locating it in the body. Hawthorne buds are very much in my upper arms, and my chest. [Pause]. My shoulders. Like a kind of - You couldn't call it a buzz, I'm not talking about a buzz - I'm talking about a kinda, something, delicate.

Two respondents provide examples where a felt sense is a reaction to environmental destruction. Mary recounts an occasion when she watched a small patch of ground that had been left "wild" being dug up by a mechanical digger, and said she "hurt physically" as the machine cut into the earth. Zoe explained how she got "a feeling in my body, when I make a connection with something or somewhere that's being damaged". There are similar examples amongst protest site Eco-Pagans (see "The Power of Place: Protest Site Eco-Paganism"), where the same process of attending to a felt sense is apparent.

Relationship to the land or to specific places is a key theme in interviews, and again this is often understood through a felt sense. Sally has a particularly interesting physical reaction to significant places:

Sometimes I find that when I go to places that resonate with me [...] I get diarrhoea or something. Like my body cleanses itself. [...] And I always think 'Oh, that's my body doing its reacting to the land, to the ground that I'm on'. It's an odd thing, and I've only really noticed that since I did that year of kind of ... [Priestess training]. I think I didn't think about it before. Probably it was happening and I just didn't notice. I think it's that probably that I notice now.

Sally's embodied awareness is tuned to the point where her body acts like a barometer that can sense the spiritual pressure of place, and although the role of her

⁶ The 'Wheel of the Year' consists of eight evenly spaced festival dates that mark the changing seasons.

Priestess training remains ambiguous at the very least, it enhanced her bodily awareness.

Situated Embodied Knowing in Trance

Greenwood's model of magical consciousness (Greenwood, 2005) applies Bateson's model of an ecology of mind (Bateson, 2000 [1974]) to understand the way Gordon uses dance to communicate with the other-than-human world:

Gordon's dance is about participating in such an interconnected system as an inspired pattern - a web of *wyrd* - whereby the act of dancing enables spirits, energy and people to meet in a world that is alive (Greenwood, 2005: 97).

Bateson suggested that dance could serve as an "interface between conscious and unconscious" (Bateson, [1972] 2000: 138), offering a means of understanding messages that the dancer is consciously unaware of. This does not involve a Freudian unconscious but one built on an ecology of mind and is therefore consistent with the enactive process model. This process is apparent in Greenwood's description of an occasion when she watched Gordon dance with his spirit family:

As the drumming increased, it was evident to me that there was a participatory communication between Gordon and the spirits in process, the other than human was coming into the human form. At times there seemed to be a non-verbal discussion going on as Gordon's body appeared to act out questions and answers in a swirling profusion of expressive movements (Greenwood, 2005: 94).

This is a perfect example of how trance functions within the enactive process model; Gordon shifts his awareness to a deep embodied self that melts the boundaries between subject and object, enabling communication with the "other than human".

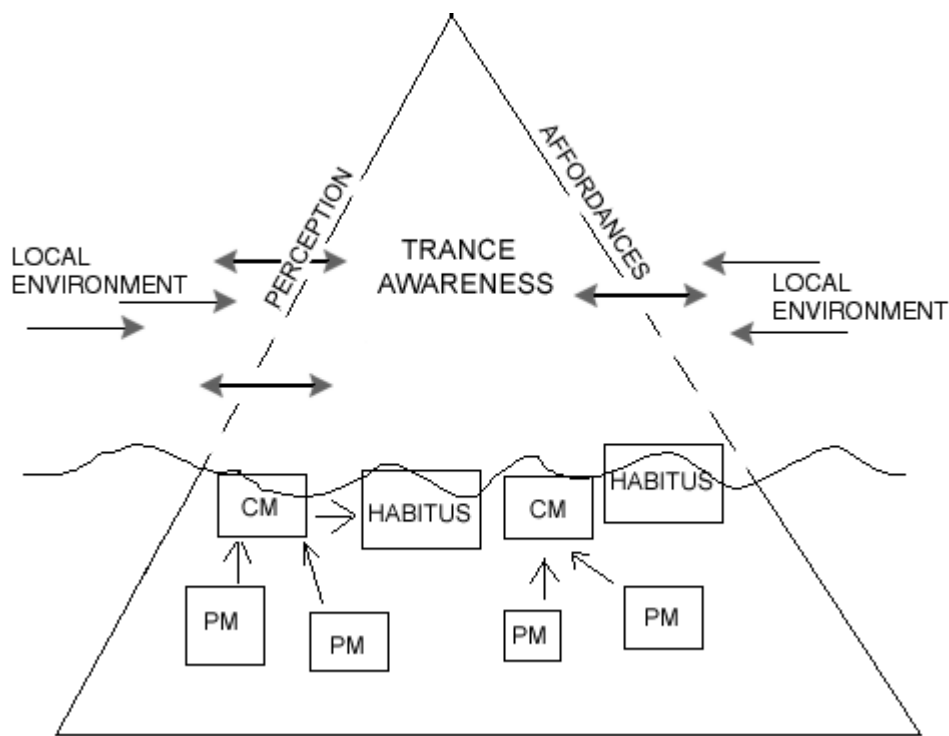


Figure 4: The Trance State
(Reproduced from chapter 4)

Greenwood raises the question of "whether the spirits are 'real' or whether they are a part of Gordon's ... imagination" and concludes that we must understand the process within its own terms, thereby "by-passing the issue" (Greenwood, 2005: 96-98). While this is an appropriate emic position, it appears problematic given my philosophical stance, as the spirits Sekhara and Gordon describe appear have no physical form and it is not clear how an incorporeal being could exist on my current model. There is also the question of Shamanic journeying: When a Shaman - or any Pagan - journeys some believe that their 'spirit' is, in some sense, focused *beyond* the body.

We can move the discussion forward using the enactive process model. The first point to note is the apparent lack of consistency in the experience of different Shamans: Barry described how he could pragmatically shift his belief paradigms to suit the situation, allowing his consciousness "to fall into [...] patterns". On one occasion his consciousness could "fall into an animistic pattern", on another "consciousness will fall into a more monotheistic pattern", or perhaps, he suggested, "I contain all this and it is a virtual reality". Each mode of consciousness was treated like "game rules" with the option of asking "[w]hat game am I going to play today, because they're all just games". All these modes are embodied states of consciousness:

Each different trance state means you experience your body in a different way, just as each differ trance state means your experience the world - the sensory world - in a different way. The sensory world is a creation of the body [...] The real world is out there [...] but our experience of the world is a creation of the body and the brain and the mind. And so each trance state means that you

experience the body differently and you experience the world differently.

Barry's world view is compatible with the enactive process model, and he described obtaining knowledge through heightened sensory acuity and via the extended cognition of what I call the deep body. Mark's experience of obtaining knowledge thorough Shamanistic trance also fits this model. When I asked where information obtained in trance came from, Mark suggested it was ultimately from "a higher state of consciousness" or the "Gaian super mind". For Gendlin the body "is an ongoing interaction with its environment" that potentially has access to "a vast amount of environmental information" (Gendlin, 1992: 349). Although not a "Gaian super mind", such a body could access a profound amount of local knowledge. Although Mark did not discuss the role of the Shaman, both Barry and Gordon emphasized that it is a "path of service to the community" (Barry), so the Gendlian body could readily supply the kind of information a Shaman would seek. For Mark the body is fundamental in accessing this information because "you can't separate that [the role of the body] from anything". Although a trance state means the Shaman is working with "non-ordinary states of reality", the body remains a key source of information:

Any effect you have on the physical body will effect you emotionally, mentally and spiritually. [...] Anything that effects one of those will effect all of them to some degree. [...] So that physical reaction you're having [...] is actually a response to what's going on in every other level of your being.

When Mark goes on a Shamanic journey he becomes "almost super aware" of his physicality "because you work on, on every sense of the body really, um, particularly sort of intuitive senses." As a result

it's the emotions, it's where it effects me in my body - that plays just as much a part as what I'm seeing or experiencing in my mind or what have you, if you want to call it that [...] So in one way you're completely *out* of your body but at the same time being more in your body than you are normally, really.

Sekhara initially describes what sounds like a quite disembodied experience:

I think the feeling is that I'm not so much conscious of my body at all, which is good 'cos I end up doing stuff in a lot of extremely uncomfortable places. Getting cold or whatever. When I come back into my body from doing a journey, even though my body's been conscious of the time that I've been here, I'm not [...] I think a lot of it is about not being in my body in a sense. Not in a way that I don't want to be but that's the state to be in to do these things.

But she later describes the experience as much more like a change in embodied awareness:

I think it's focused attention really, like you know when your typing you're not aware of what's going on around you or you're reading and you're lost in your book. People can talk to me when I reading and I don't hear then so it's that

very focused kind of attention [...] It's kind of a shift of awareness.

When I probed on this subject she unpacked her understanding that "to some extent your soul manifests your body". That aspect of her being that manifests her body can shift "into something else rather than being taken out of it and put into something else". Her metaphor makes this clear: It is "[k]ind of like a cathode ray tube projecting onto a screen, and the screen's the body but the projector kind of pulls a step back and projects somewhere else". This clarification leads her to explain that "[t]hat's why in a sense, I wouldn't say out-of-body".

Some of Gordon's Shamanic communication can be understood in a similar way as it "often" comes "out of a physical contact or connection, but not always". In such cases "it's usually feeling [...] that can be very precise". Similarly, though Gordon does visit the Otherworld, it "isn't separate from this world". This world and the Otherworld are "kind of the same place, but looked at - perceived from a different point of view", but "when you're operating in the Otherworld, you're not operating in our - this current physical world". The distinctions between - or identity of - this world and the Otherworld are subtle, but comprehensible on the enactive process model without resorting to reductionism.

When I explained this model of trance earlier using my cognitive iceberg, I hypothesised that as a practitioner moves into deeper trance states and conventional maps of 'reality' break down, the Shaman would use familiar cultural maps to make sense of their experiences. Obviously different cultural maps provide different shamanic worlds, and even the few interviews I have undertaken illustrate Vitebsky's point that "there are many shamanisms (Atkinson 1992), just as there are many monotheisms" (Vitebsky, 2000: 55).

Although I follow Greenwood's lead in understanding these experiences in context, I develop the discussion by applying the enactive process model. My enactive process model of trance awareness is based on the "established results" of current cognitive neuroscience research (Varela, 1999: 71) and correlates with the experience of dissociation. Furthermore it helps make sense of the experiences described by participants, and can explain why Shamans from different cultures describe their Otherworld journeys differently. However this remains no more than a hypothesis, and at this stage in the development of cognitive neuroscience and ethnographic research it would be absurd for me to try to develop an 'explanation' what spirits might - or might not - be. It remains unclear how an incorporeal spirit could exist on my current philosophical model, but this is understandable given the complexity of human consciousness, which Dennett describes as "the most mysterious feature of our minds" (Dennett, 1987: 160).

Situated Embodied Knowing in Ritual and Dance

We saw above how dance can speak a language beyond words, and this reveals two interrelated aspects of embodied cognition: First, dance allows a place or spirit to communicate to the dancer, and second, the dance can serve as a bridge between the dancers deep embodied knowing and their conscious awareness. These aspects work

together when a place or a spirit communicates with the dancer through a deep embodied knowing that must be expressed in dance to become conscious. This process becomes apparent in the interview with Zoe when we read how her body has "a different way of moving" that is "like a dance" when she is connecting to a place. When Zoe's "body moves then something is able to move" and this dance enables "inspiration and the expression" to "flow through". The "something" that moves is "[i]nspiration. The Awen. The - What the place is trying to tell me", which can be "an insight" or "a sense of, my ancestors or the ancestors of the place being around me". The *movement* of the dance is fundamental and without movement there is no contact: "If [...] I'm frozen in some way physically, then I can't hear. I can't listen. Nothing will flow through me. So I have to move in some way with it, how ever simple it is, I have to move physicality in some way".

Although a felt sense is usually carried forward by a word or phrase, a gesture or movement can be more appropriate (Gendlin, 2000: 263), and this is often how Zoe's dance functions. Her embodied knowing is often expressed with a typical felt sense:

if there's something difficult that's trying to speak, then there will be a lump in my throat, um, grief will be further down my body, will be quite heavy round my hips and belly.

At other time she will use "dance and movement as well [...] [l]istening to what's there and seeing how it wants to move. So, kicking out or swirling or just rocking or something like that to bring that out of my body so that I know what it is". The movement helps her to understand what a sensation is about:

I'll get an idea, of what it's about. 'Oh, this is about grief'. But I won't necessarily understand the depth of it or how that moves until I move. [...] there are patterns that my body makes repeatedly. Um. Ways in which my body moves that I'm getting used to that indicate that something's going on. You know, something needs to rise to the surface and come out. So that I can understand it a bit better.

Zoe experienced a similar sense when working ritually with a particular site:

half way up the hill, there's an old hawthorn tree. So I would always stop there as I felt she was the guardian of the outer, ring. I've no idea if anyone else ever felt this, but I would have to stop there [...] ask her permission, and then wait for the answer. And the answer would come in a bodily sense. [...] It's like a sense of permission in my body.

This permission was sensed as a slight pressure on her back: "It was like a propelling forward motion from behind. Like 'Yes!' You know. Pushing me gently forward". Once past this stage Zoe would come to "the inner level" where she would often

receive a 'no'. That would be like a frontal sense - like a closing down. I could

feel it, yeah, it's definitely a front of body closed down. [Holds her open palms in front of her body]. Like someone's just drawn a curtain or shut a door in front of me.

The way that place communicates with Zoe within a ritual via a felt sense also occurs more generally in the process of thinking with the land.

Thinking with the Land

The enactive process model claims that we think with our immediate environment, and several instances in my interviews can be interpreted as thinking with place. As we heard, Sally often visits Cross Bones cemetery, a prostitutes graveyard in South London. Her sense of the place is not simply historical or cultural, and she is clear that "if I intellectualize it, I think it should be a sad place, it should make me angry". But Cross Bones is much more than that: It provides "a connection with the city" and "an idea of the ancestors and how people go back and back. I feel I need to be able to tap into that to look at the future as well". It also "taps into [...] feelings about the way women are treated and feminism and eco-feminism and the way the Earth's treated and all those things." Cross Bones thus offers a powerful pattern for emotional and spiritual understanding.

Mary's experience of tuning in to trees and places using the felt sense, discussed above, offers another example. Mary explains how she sometimes experiences feelings which she assumes are from a particular tree or place: "The feeling is how it makes my body feel". She is unsure whether these feelings necessarily originate from the spirit of the tree or place, so interpreting this in terms of thinking with place does no violence her own understanding. Zoe's experience can also be understood as a process of thinking through an issue using the mind/body/environment, although she understands it purely in terms of spirits of place. This need not be as reductionist as it at first appears: Enactivism illustrates the artificiality of subject/object distinctions, and extended cognition proposes that the mind reaches beyond the "skin-bag", so it is by no means clear where Zoe's mind ends and the spirit of place begins. This complex way of understanding 'thinking with place' challenges our conventional notions, but can be understood as a meta-level equivalent to communication with the spirit of place.

Thinking with place involves specific locations, so helps explain why many urban Eco-Pagans felt a special attachment to a particular place. Often such special places serve as a "threshold brook" that provides a "deepening sense of place" (Patterson, n.d.) for Eco-Pagans, who often listen to its voice using the felt sense. As Barry explained, when the threshold brook speaks, the hearers world changes forever because it reveals our "sacred relationship with the world" (Zoe): Thus one place can pattern a sacred relationship to the world. With this point in mind, I close with Barry's discussion of thinking with place, which he has developed out of over 20 years of practice. He has concluded, in general accord with enactivists like Varela, that we are a "kind of [pause] panoramic unconditioned presence", part of a system "rather than an object or a subject". At times "the system that generates the virtual image of Barry and the system that generates the virtual image of the Genius loci

[...] engage with one another and they become one system. And there's no limit to what that could be". When this happens "you become one facet of awareness in a vaster and bigger and wider and richer and deeper kind of reality than the one we usually inhabit" and this is one way in which Barry understands Shamanic experience.

Because our consciousness is tightly woven into the wider system, Barry concludes, as do extended cognition theorists like Preston (2003), that "our sense of meaning and our sense of value is actually conditioned by our surroundings, so if we're constantly surrounded by human artifacts then we're being conditioned by that". Unfortunately, for most Western people the local environment is a "poverty stricken" "sensory desert". The "world of human artifacts and symbols, is very charged with meaning, but if that's the only meaning we're exposed to then we lose contact with the bigger world. 'Cos I think that's a very narrow frequency range". But if "we get out into the dirty, messy, tangled, luxuriant, deep, smelly world that is commonly designated the natural world [...] we start feeling things we don't usually feel". This is because the natural world has a "[s]ensory data richness" that we don't get "in most human environments". It takes time to become sensitive to this data richness, but given time and the right intention we can develop our awareness and thereby our connection to place. This returns us to a major theme of my interviews; *connection*. Barry's "threshold brook" symbolises the subtle power of that sensory richness, and if "we spend enough time by the threshold brook, and listen to it we hear more and more". As Barry - and all my participants - understand, this is a deeply healing process: "If I've got a bit of a headache or I'm feeling down and depressed I'll go for a walk in the woods, and I'll feel a hell of a lot better for doing that, mate. And we all do that". This one refrain can be heard in every interview: Connecting to the other than human world brings spiritual healing and understanding.

Conclusion

Most urban Eco-Pagans experienced a powerful childhood recognition of their connection with the organic environment that inspired an earth based spirituality grounded in an embodied knowing. Nearly all urban Eco-Pagans experienced some disillusionment in their interactions with other Pagans, many of whom do not share their enthusiasms. However many urban Eco-Pagans benefited from the training they received in mainstream Traditions, typically becoming more sensitive to their bodies in general and their felt sense in particular. The felt sense served as a key process of connection: By learning to become aware of how we think *with* and *through* the embodied situated self, urban Eco-Pagans enhanced their embodied communion with places, flora, fauna and spirits, thereby enriching their practice and nourishing a life-long spirituality. As well as being profoundly healing, these intimate local relationships - this listening to the threshold brook - patterned a sacred relationship to the world. It is the recognition of our connection with the organic environment that ignites and feeds the fires of urban Eco-Paganism. In the next chapter ('The Power of Place: Protest Site Eco-Paganism') we will see the impact of spending extended periods of time in the organic environment, and I draw these threads together in 'Eco-Paganism: A "sacred relationship with the world" '.