Would you like to contribute to the next issue of the Bent Pentacle?

Rants, drawings, spells, recipes, essays, photographs, poetry, art, debates, experiences, tips, etc, etc, etc...

Send me whatever you've got, this is your space to get it out! Please send contributions to:

gokristofski@hotmail.co.uk

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The Bent Pentacle

Issue #1: Samhain, October 31st 2008

A zine for queer pagans of all genders, sexualities and paths

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Welcome to the first issue of the Bent Pentacle!

I wanted to put together this zine as a place for those of a queer pagan mentality to exchange ideas and build a sense of community, as well as for those with an interest in queer, pagan spirituality and how the two might intersect. My first venture into queer paganism was at Queer Pagan Camp in 2007, this was a really amazing for me, I really valued being around people with whom I could share two of the most important parts of my life and be accepted and understood. At the moment, QPC is the only specifically queer pagan group (as far as I'm aware anyway), though there are quite a few gay pagan groups. I wanted to try and do my bit to develop a queer pagan community, both in the UK and internationally. I feel like it's important to branch out beyond QPC, as it is at the moment there is a lot of pressure on the camp and the community around it to be everything for everyone, but it's not going to be possible to meet everyone's needs and desires when you only have one week in the year!

Though I know that many people who read this will be involved in some way with QPC, I'm hoping that there will also be many people who have never been and possibly never will. I also hope that people who read this will be inspired, challenged, excited and moved by the contents. I am very greatful to those who have contributed to this first issue and I hope that there will be many more to come!

Your editor,

Kris Wombat

gokristofski@hotmail.co.uk

Why Do We Need Queer Paganisms?

Let me tell you the story of a Druid camp I went to one Beltaine not so many moons ago.

The site was on a river bend and the stars glittered at night. People were friendly and glad to be outdoors. In the evenings, around a roaring fire, they told stories and made music. A talented and bardic crowd; the camp was run by a Druidic couple, both with long flowing hair. He had a long flowing beard too, and a cloak of feathers, she sported a large brooch and dress of velvet. Most of the people at the camp were in boy/ girl couples and had children with them. Not my usual magical crew. Still, I thought – it's good to be open to possibilities.

The main ritual over the long weekend was a celebration for the first of May. In preparation, all the men were asked to repair to the great outdoors and take part in physical games together; tug of war, wrestling and the like. All the women were asked to repair to the great indoors, a marquee tent, and make flower garlands and learn to belly dance.

I was so covered in dismay the hairs on the back of my neck began to prickle. Surely not, I thought. I was younger then and I passed well enough - blonde, femme and dressed in pink and green. I mean - you couldn't tell I was queer from the outside. But I didn't feel as if I could belong there. Those kind Druid people, who wanted to be together in community under the night skies, and who showed me their hunting

knives and their Lord of the Rings replica jewellery; what exactly did they think they were they doing? All the men to an outdoor space and physical prowess, all the women to an indoor space and physical adornment.... I felt as if I couldn't breathe. Had none of them heard of feminism or gender stereotyping?

In the marquee tent the circle of women was asked to speak about what "the goddess" meant to them, sitting in the round as they wove flower stalks together. *Mother, nurturer, menstruating milk and honey, lover to the wild god...* hmmn, the company seemed unlikely to go for a man/woman goat/fish hermaphrodite. So, I picked something less gender queer for starters. I spoke about those goddesses who are lovers of women, Sumerian Inanna and her lover Ninshubur for instance. Vigorous nodding resulted. But I noticed several women move further away from me in the dancing that followed. On the plus side, a number of others thawed right out. These women were the ones who'd kept an eye on me at the fire the night before in relation to their men folk. It seemed I was sucking on the bitter lemon of a history vacuum - all that consciousness raising gone before, and yet here it was to do all over again.

Someone in the circle said that gay people were welcome at the camp, and they meant it. Was I losing the plot? I'm not often in purely heterosexual circles in any area of my life these days. Perhaps I had simply forgotten what it was like? But my sense of suffocation and dismay felt something more, something fundamental.

After the belly dancing and tug-of-war was over, the women were invited to go together and dig a hole in the ground. The men, it was explained, would place a great pole in the hole dug by the women, raising a Maypole for the dance at dusk. I didn't take part in the hole-digging. I could not spend my Beltaine being a ritual hole.

These modern Druid people, dreaming of a Celtic society-that-was, a time when women overflowed with flowers and childbearing and men made war over cattle; what *was* going on? I could not deny this magic meant something to the people taking part. I watched their faces glowing as they danced around the Maypole together, making the ribbons weave in and out. It was going to be a boy/girl, boy/girl affair, but I spoke up on that (and yes I danced the dance) and a less polarised circle ensued. Magic based in heterosexual fertility and gender division, mapped onto the season of Spring; well, it's a magic with its own potency for sure. And if the people participating were content, who was I to object? But, I did. I do.

Some of your children will be queer, I thought. Indeed perhaps some of your young girls may prefer tug-of-war, and some of your young boys, belly-dancing, whatever their sexuality (go straight sissies and tomboys!) In this new religion, a simple physical delight in non-stereotyped pursuits is in danger of being framed as "less spiritual". What space then for the spirituality of same-sex desire or gender variance? Where will your lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex children fit? Will they dig holes or raise poles?

I think every Pagan or Neo-Pagan group, large or small, should be asking itself these questions. The reality is that very few of them are. Religions and their ritual forms often prescribe for people how they should inhabit and experience gender and sexuality. In history, as today, many if not most, religious and spiritual spaces create hierarchies of gendered and sexed spiritual bodies. We all know the Pope believes homosexuality is a sin. The Church of Rome is still a powerful force in the world. Modern Paganisms like to think of themselves as free of the oppressive tendencies of certain forms of Christianity or Islam or Judaism. But are they? I was so very happy to be returning to my separatist queer magical community after that camp by the river bend. And when you need a separatist space, you know it's bad out there...

For me, it is not enough to be told I am welcome as a queer person into a spiritual space that is fundamentally structured as heterosexual. So I am not a Reconstructionist. Oh, I'm interested in history, very interested; but I don't want to live in an ancient past. Modern paganisms are *modern* for a reason. We are talking no anaesthetic, unlimited childbearing, not being able to read or write and lice, *lots* of lice people. I don't want to erase the fundamental struggles of the last one hundred years and fifty years for female emancipation, for the recognition of same sex desire, for a greater understanding of the experience of being trans, all in my search for a closer spiritual relationship with the natural world. I want to delight in those hard fought, hard won social transformations and incorporate them into my queer pagan magic. So all hail to the man/woman goat/fish hermaphrodite goddess and hir many and marvellous brethren!

Jenny Ex-bunches August 2008

Portrait of the Artist as a Young Pagan

by Caroline

"Why are you a pagan?" some people annoyingly ask. Annoyingly, because I can never quite fathom what on earth to say. I've very rarely given the whole, long answer, preferring instead to mumble that it's always been there in me, and that paganism does not discriminate against those of us whom mainstream society sees as being not entirely normal. Here is the whole, long answer - a potted history of my spiritual life up to now, aged 30, for your reading pleasure. I do apologise if it bores you to tears; I'm just grateful to have the cathartic opportunity of getting all this off my chest for once...

When I was born my parents had two cats, Sam and Gigi. I must have been about two when, as I cuddled the big black tom Sam, I wondered what the difference was between cats and people. Sure they *look* different, but as I looked into Sam's serene yellow eyes I felt that the essence of me and the essence of him were, well, *essentially* the same. Deep thoughts for a toddler, sure, and I'm definitely translating my memory into grownup speak, but the fact is that after that moment I became fiercely protective of animals, knowing that some people refuse to understand them and honour them the way I did. I yelled in the school yard at the girl whose family went foxhunting; I told my grandmother off for owning a fur coat. At age four, my mother tells me, she ate a chicken drumstick in front of me and the fact it looked like part of an animal brought me close to vomiting. She had to hide the roast turkey carcass on Christmas day and take all the bones from my food.

At six, in bible class, Mrs Jones instructed us that animals were created by god for humans to kill, eat and generally do with as they pleased. I was horrified, stuck my hand up and made an objection and was made to stand in the corner.

The day after Gigi died, one of the boys in my class bounded up to a weeping ten-year-old me. "It's only a cat," he said. I threw a punch and knocked him out in one. How dare he say that about a being who was as important to me as every other member of my family?

When I discovered at the age of eleven that humans can survive quite easily without meat I became a vegetarian immediately. My mother thought it was just a phase - she should have known better... My parents, I should point out, have no religion. My father believes in 'something', my mother is an atheist. I remember asking her if there was a god, and she gave the best answer a parent can possibly give: "only you can work that out for yourself". They encouraged me to question everything, and gave me the books and the time to teach myself, but other than that they left the subject alone.

Aside from being a self-righteous Lisa Simpson-type pain in the arse, I was also a confirmed tomboy. Girls, it seemed to me, did incredibly boring things, like play with dolls, enact doctor and nurse scenarios and practice putting on make-up. Boys, on the other hand, climbed trees, skateboarded, built dens and played football. Loads more fun. I was also acutely aware of the societal power relations at play. Boys got the most interesting jobs and earned the most money, and the only way a girl could get on without a man was to turn herself into a monster like then prime minister Margaret Thatcher.

Angry at my sex, I badgered my mother to let me have a crew-cut, skateboarded around in jeans and a t-shirt and was never happier when people mistook me for a boy. And why wouldn't they? I'd be scrabbling around in the dirt, watching the woodlice and the ants, pulling beetle larvae from rotting logs and sat motionless on thick branches as sparrows and song thrushes fluttered at arm's length. It was a lonely childhood - I was mocked and ostracised by the girls and felt a mutual loathing for their femininity, and although accepted tentatively by the boys I think they were always a bit suspicious of me. I immersed myself in nature - my heroes were the Davids Attenborough and Bellamy - and although very adept at science I could

never wholly accept that there wasn't anything more than matter - some energy linking everything; some holiness in every grub and leaf and rock I played with.

Neither could I accept the bible, which I read from cover to cover when I was thirteen. Apart from Jesus' platitudes it seemed a vehicle of hatred and oppression. If there was holiness to be found it wasn't in that 'good' book.

At the age of fourteen, about the time I had started to have outward crushes on boys and inward ones on girls, I first heard about Wicca. I didn't know what it was about, but I thought the pentacle jewellery looked cool and that wearing it would upset all those straight Christians. I tried to learn to read Tarot cards, played with Ouija boards (and subsequently lost a lot of sleep) and had a thing for wearing too much kohl. However, as my interest in Paganism was not earthed in anything other than 'coolness' I soon lost interest and became agnostic, never finding anything which fitted me. I felt lost.

We studied the poetry of William Blake in A level English. "Everything that lives is holy," he said. The more I read about him the more I agreed. I had discovered that there were other people with similar beliefs to me for the first time; God was in everything. I had discovered pantheism. I still could not accept Christianity, even Blake's version, and continued to search. I read a lot about Buddhism but that wasn't quite right either - I took a lot of knowledge from it but at a visceral level it felt mystical and foreign to me. I knew *what* I believed, but couldn't find anything those beliefs could fit into. "I believe in the Force from *Star Wars*," I'd joke to friends.

Then, after ten years away, a relationship break-up took me back to the land of my fathers; the land of my soul. After a 'chance' meeting (I really believe there's no such thing), a friend of a friend told me about 'soul retrieval'. Hippy crap, I thought, but as my new friend Debi explained more suddenly everything made sense. My throat lumped up, tears welled in my eyes and something pulled at my solar plexus - I knew I had to have this 'soul retrieval' thing. Debi leant me Sandra Ingerman's book of the same name and gave me the email address of a 'shaman' who had helped her. (There are shamans in the UK and they have email addresses? WTF?!) Half-expecting some weirdo charlatan, I was pleasantly surprised to meet Churaig, a big bear of an Aussie – laid back, friendly, funny and completely trustworthy. He talked my through his practice, asked me why I'd come to him, and about my beliefs. Then, after a lot of drumming, a bit of sage-burning and quite a few tears, he succeeded in giving me back something which my ex-partner had eroded away from me during the five years we were together. Churaig and I have been firm friends ever since. He's helped me learn so much about myself and the way of the world, and the books of Starhawk explained to me exactly what I have known in my heart all along. I exist to honour all things, and am a part of all things, and all things are a part of me. We are not separate; there is no book to tell us what we must and mustn't do, or can and cannot sleep with. There is no "thou shalt not" writ on the door. This is the Garden of Love, and all acts of pleasure honour it. Maybe it's hippy crap to some, but frankly my dear, I don't give a damn.

And then

It's the things that I can't put a finger on -

The hints present in certain media that speak to me -

I could quote from the music that speaks to me of this, but I'd rather you could hear it - or would I? I don't even know if others would hear what I hear in it.

I don't see deities, I don't see male female queer or otherwise deities, spirits....I'm not sure I deal with entities at all, or whether it's more the energies, the forces, that I try to tune into.

It's the acknowledgment that there is more to this than the 3 dimensions we're told about -

That there's more to life than the goals we're encouraged to aim for -

That there are other things influencing what we do, what we are, what we become

I'm not sure that I know what other Queer Pagan Campers are on about when they talk about magic -

I'm not sure I know what they mean, aim for, or do when they do rituals.

I do know they have acknowledged the pagan* in me, the magic worker in me. I don't know for certain what it is they see.

But it is one place I feel free to explore that, and where these ideas and explorations are validated.

In some ways it's about perceptions of reality.

To me the point of 'Queer' is to go beyond the accepted norms of gender and sexuality, to free ourselves of the boundaries and accepted forms of behavior for our given gender, and to be free spirits outside of that, able to explore what else we are capable of. The way I see it, the human race is controlled and repressed through our sexuality and our sexual desires; and the pressure to pair off, and the lack of variety of ways to fulfill for our emotional needs, makes us vulnerable in this way. In this way it limits us and keeps us in place, easily manipulated, blinded to our true capabilities.

And then to paganism*. To me this is where we do away with the accepted, rational notions of what is real. And see what else we are, and what else there is. Channel and steer other energies, which aren't measurable by any instrument. Allow other energies to work through us. I seek to go beyond. To see what else there is.

So the significance of 'queer' in my 'pagan path', is that I doubt I would explore this, in a culture that was heavily bound by ideas of gender dualism, heteronormativity, (and even homonormativity!), and of biological determinism. My path has started with queer music, and continued with queer pagan camp, so my preconceptions of the non-queer pagan 'scene' are totally unverified. It may not even be a problem. Maybe I should go to a witch camp and see what I make of it and what they make of me. Then maybe I can write with more certainty about what's queer about my paganism, since I've never known any other kind.

*I use the word paganism, as it it's what the 'P' in QPC stands for, and it's the context of this camp, and community, that I'm talking about this. I don't know that I would call myself a pagan. I don't know that I have any English language words to describe myself and what I do in this area.

By Rosy Gremmyln

How I found my way to Queer Pagan Camp

It was August. It was too hot. Too hot to think. I tried sleeping in a cold, damp, lightless railway arch in Brixton. Cycling in traffic at 3am, it was to hot to wear much clothing. Getting beeped at wearing a backless top at night. How to get out. The haze of heat hung over the tarmac. My brain was melting. Then T called me, asked was I planning on going to this camp? She was getting a lift there, her train ticket was going spare - would I use it if she posted it to me? -- An escape!

I'd seen an ad for the camp in 1998, and not made it that summer...that's a different story. I had an inkling of what it was. I was scared of going to a gathering on my own. But what the hell, it's a train ticket to a field near the sea. If I don't like it and they don't like me, at least I'll be somewhere it's easier to bear the heat. Under a tree, far from the traffic. I went.

3.15pm from Waterloo station. I asked C what she thought, when I realised my tent was in someone else's hands. Would I be ok? - Sure, she'd heard plenty of tent-swapping goes on, you're bound to be ok. I must have had a map, some pages from a road atlas, some directions... I walked, hitched, wandering down country roads in the sunshine.

I arrived as people were eating dinner. The initial welcome was a little cold - I'd come around to the wrong gate, missed the official welcome, and the first person who spoke to me, well, I don't think there's any love lost there. But this was the exception. People were so friendly. Introduced themselves to me, and invited me to join in with things going on.

My memories of it are idyllic. Connecting to other people and to aspects of myself which rarely came out to play anymore. Connecting to the natural world again - these were the words on the ad I read back in 1998 which drew my interest in the first place. It remains one of the most important aspects of the camp for me to the present day.

And so to the present. Somehow the way camp has developed over the years has brought it to a stage where the direction the camp is going in is not the one for me. For all that, it's the only camp of its kind, and the DIY spirit means that it can change. Wherever it goes, and whether or not other camps begin to happen, it remains an important part of my path so far. Five years ago it helped me open up a part of myself which I'd locked away for its own safety. It also introduced me to a whole range of wonderful beings who I love, who I respect and who I feel lucky to have encountered.

By Rosy Gremmyln

Samhain

Bring out the dead for Samhain!

The reaper is joining the party.

Sun shines on Scorpio and the old Crone wanes;

mysteries unfold in the moment.

In a flash we all become one...

...But only for one magical moment.

Dare I gaze into the mirror and surrender to natures wheel?

Spiraling back to the womb of the Goddess;

my timeless judgment is offered in the void.

A simple journey from fear to familiarity.

At home life unfolds.

Tomorrow is another day.

Robder.

A Queer Spirit: What are the connections between a queer mentality and a pagan/spiritual one?

As a young transsexual, I was in a rather unusual position. After I first went to the doctors at the age of 16 to tell him that I was transsexual and I wanted to be referred to the relevant people, I had a wait of two and a half years before I even saw anyone. Although this was very difficult at the time I am now very glad of what this un-influenced, uninterrupted time gave to me. I went into a period of deep self discovery, it was a very exciting process for me and it taught me a lot.

Not being brought up into culture's view of masculinity, and not being influenced by the rigid gender roles expected by the gender clinic, I was able to take a step outside of the cultural norms and view them for what they really are. It gave me an opportunity to sort through and distinguish what was really me and what was me trying to be what I felt I should be, or what I was being told I should be. This was a very long process, and I'm still learning now. I felt distanced from most of the other trans men I met when I was taking those first steps. I felt like I wasn't "trans enough", as my efforts to take on the norms of maleness never went very well. This was mainly because part of me always knew that a lot of it was cultural bullshit.

In our capitalist culture, we are encouraged to define ourselves through identities. We find a pre-packaged identity we like and that seems to suit us and we decide that this is who we are, Or else we are given an identity based on things such as gender, sexuality, class, race, ability etc. Each pre-packed identity comes with its own expression, behaviour and, most importantly, products for consumption. Although the things that these identities are based on may be very real, the cultural package that forms around them only exists in the minds of those who believe in it. We may act out our assigned or chosen identities and believe that we are "being ourselves", but unless we become aware of ourselves and how we are moulded by the culture we live in we won't know who "ourselves" really is.

There is nothing wrong with taking on an identity if it suits us to do so and it makes us happy, though to do so with a sense of awareness is likely to be more rewarding. It is possible, and often necessary, to take on the language of identity in order to describe our activities or experience rather than shape and define them. This is important to highlight oppression for example, and also to communicate our own experience to people, connect with those who have similar experience and have empathy for those with different.

The deconstruction of gender that is encouraged and celebrated within the radical queer community can be a gateway for people into a deconstruction of the whole of the self. In doing this we can move away from being defined and constricted by identities and becoming whole.

Capitalism is based on a process of "divide and conquer". As individuals we are told that we are not good enough, that we need more, that to be better than everyone else is to be happy. But on this individualistic, linear path there is no destination, just constant dissatisfaction as we will never have enough.

We are given the illusion that individualism is the key to personal power and success. The truth is kept secret, because to know this is to know our true power. This truth has been referred to as "the secret that can never be told", not because people are not allowed to but because it is something which is experienced and cannot be communicated in language.

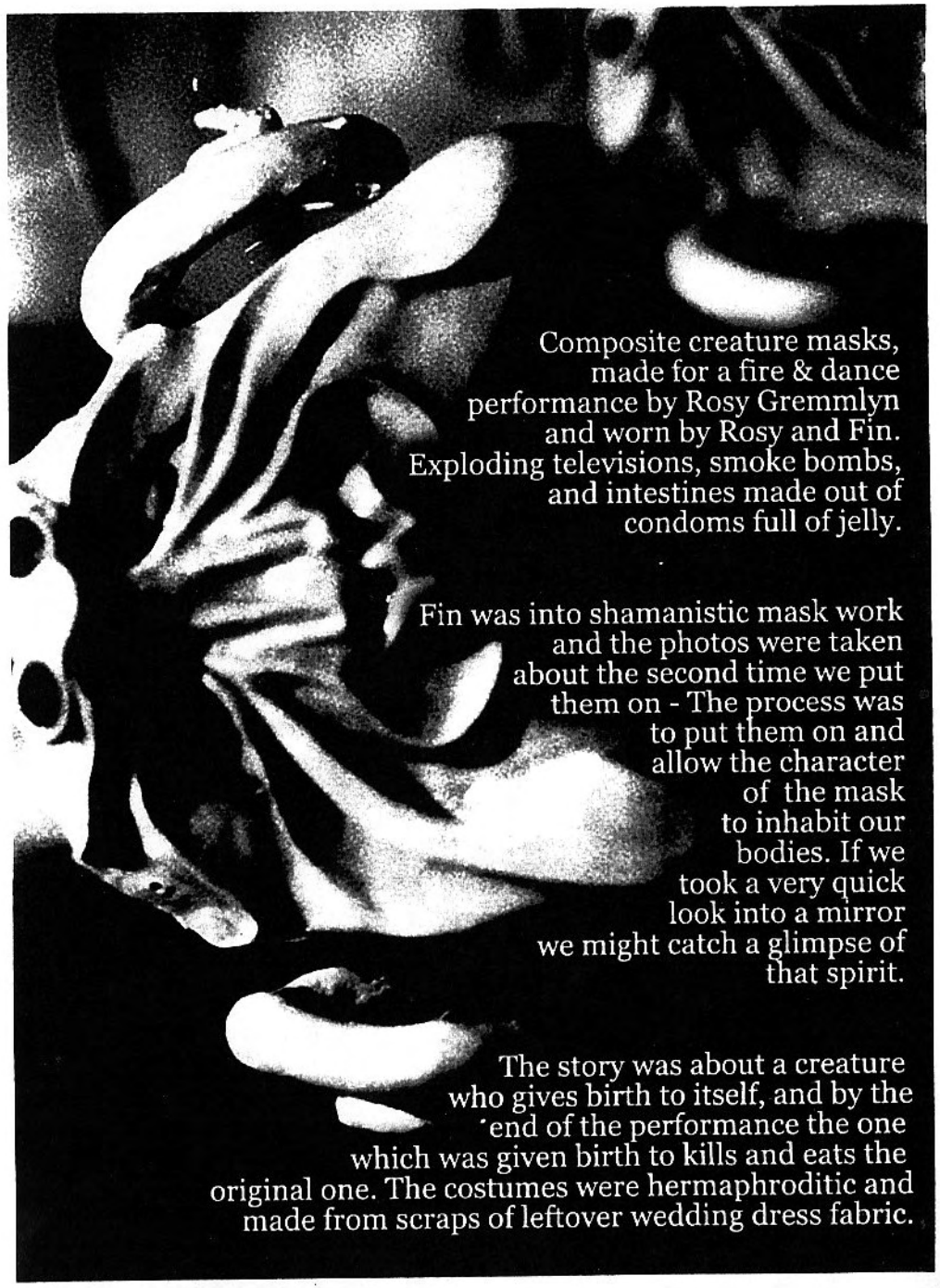
When we can tap into this deep well of power and energy we know that we don't need to stand as individuals to be happy, we have the whole of existence behind and around us. We may only be one tiny speck of existence, but, as in a fractal image, each speck contains the whole.

In religions that contain structures and hierarchies of control, we must access the spiritual through a member of the clergy who can veto anything they deem inappropriate and manipulate it to meet their own ends or that of the dominant culture. Any spiritual experiences not OK'd by those in power are considered to be the work of evil forces. In this way we are denied our own power.

Many people take on a hyper-materialistic philosophy as a reaction to the hierarchy and oppression found in many dominant religions, but to do this is to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Religion is just another structure in our culture that is put around spiritual experience to try and explain it and make sense of it, a structure that may or may not be useful to us, but we can't determine the worth of the experience itself by the worth of the structures that have built up around it.

I only started really being aware of my own spirituality about 2 years ago, but in that short time I have learnt so much both about myself and the world around me. By having a spiritual context I have been able to take situations and emotions which could have sent me off the rails and made them into positive opportunities for growth. The growth and the learning never ends, and it's a very exciting path to be on!

By Kris Wombat



Composite creature masks, made for a fire & dance performance by Rosy Gremmlyn and worn by Rosy and Fin. Exploding televisions, smoke bombs, and intestines made out of condoms full of jelly.

Fin was into shamanistic mask work and the photos were taken about the second time we put them on - The process was to put them on and allow the character of the mask to inhabit our bodies. If we took a very quick look into a mirror we might catch a glimpse of that spirit.

The story was about a creature who gives birth to itself, and by the end of the performance the one which was given birth to kills and eats the original one. The costumes were hermaphroditic and made from scraps of leftover wedding dress fabric.

Wildness

The Earth as we inhabit it today is estimated to be around 4.5 billion years old. The first sparks of life appeared in the form of very simple single celled organisms around 3 billion years ago.

Since life first got a hold of our planet there has been no stopping it, there have been at least 5 periods of mass extinction in the Earth's history caused by changes in climate and environment, and every time eco systems are destabilised and habitats destroyed, balance has managed to reestablish itself and life has flourished once again.

We have the idea that nature is fragile and delicate, and that it needs to be saved and protected, when this is not true. It has been around much longer than humans have, and will eventually recover from all the damage we have done. It is civilisation which is delicate, from the physical structures we build to the power structures such as capitalism and commercialism. Our existence and our culture is but a blink of an eyelid in geographical time. One day all these will be gone, but the Wild will still exist.

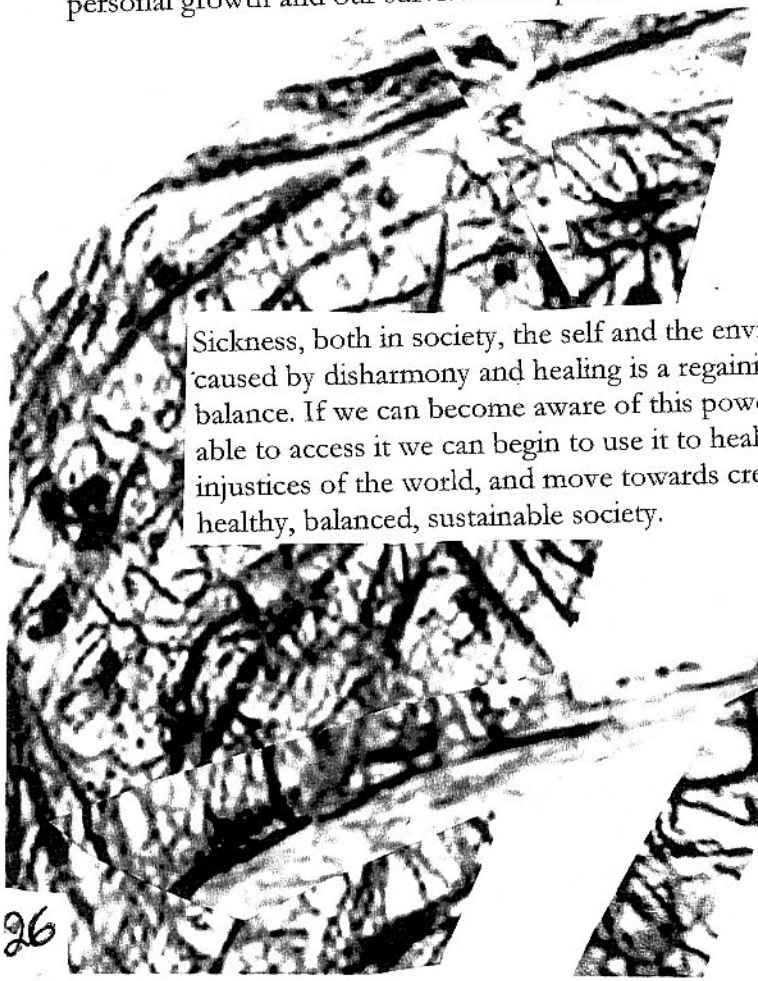
Civilisation as we experience it today is based on taming, of exerting control and power over the Wildness of the Earth. This a pointless battle, as if we put ourselves in opposition to the power of the Wild we can only lose. This is what is happening on our planet at the moment, we have thought we can tame the Wildness and now it's coming to bite us on the arse.

Contrary to how many people think of it, it is not the Earth we need to save, our planet can look after itself and has done so for billions of years. It is ourselves we need to save. Floods, droughts, infestations, disease, these are all the effects of civilisation thinking it can tame Wildness and placing itself in conflict with it. However what many people don't realise is that we are actually engaging in a battle with ourselves, for we are not separate from the Wild even though we try to separate ourselves from it with civilisation and society.

We have been cut off from the power of the Wild that is our birthright and been told that it is "evil". In a society that views the world in binary terms Wild energies are viewed as evil, but they are only destructive when we try and stand in their way instead of understanding and working with them.

The power of the Wild is the same power that pushes a crocus through tarmac, that uproots houses with tree roots, that turns metal into dust, and also the power that keeps life going through the most challenging of circumstances, and this is the power that we all have within us.

Animals, plants, rocks, fire; none of these need to learn about the Wild, it is just what they are. Instinct and natural response governs their behavior and allows them to find their place within the web of existence. Being socialised into contemporary society, we have lost these instincts and so need to relearn them. I'm not saying we should dissolve all society, nor am I trying to glamorise "primitive" culture, but we need to connect with what we've lost, both for our personal growth and our survival as a species.



Sickness, both in society, the self and the environment, is caused by disharmony and healing is a regaining of balance. If we can become aware of this power and be able to access it we can begin to use it to heal the many injustices of the world, and move towards creating a healthy, balanced, sustainable society.

By Kris Wombat

How to leave a self behind

You want to shed skin for any number of reasons. Maybe you're done with pain. Maybe you're done with routine. Maybe you're done with a name, or a gender, or a sex, or an addiction. Maybe one part of you, in your imagination and intuition, sees you somewhere else (happier). Pictures you in different surroundings, in different relations, with a different flow.

I always think we walk around with soft threads coming from us. Some like tags – where our subconscious has written it's notes and our history is pinned to us like walking museums or parcels. Other thread is like the small head of a red piece of cotton, swaying off us – invisible – like seaweed. Still providing the oxygen we breathe, but maybe not as notable as the little tags that map our body (it's bruises, scars, breaks, aches and cuts). Right now I'm interested in the little red threads.

To notice them, I try to follow a day-dream or wish. For myself, I have a tendency to be too mechanical when what I need is to create and perform. I can let my perfectionism and my craft of detail to override my spontaneous, more magic-expressive side. It's the same as staying in too long, and then whenever I step outdoors, I feel the kiss of the breeze and almost instantly my threads are waving. (Indoors, when I hibernate, my threads cover me like cat paws and whiskers. After Samhain, and before Yule, we're in the important time of rest – the year has ended (all the harvest in), and will begin again in December, according to the myths of the wheel of the year. These months are the dark, incubatory period.)

I've had shedding rituals before. I changed a name. I've burnt my repetitions when I felt they didn't get me anywhere (50 diaries in a bonfire in my backgarden, because I wasn't written or being anything new. I was stagnating).

I can pop skin quite frequently. Maybe with a trip, a good dance, a good wank. Some little beginnings and ends are still, of course, mundane. They are household actions. Others require bigger risks and jumps.

Some things you can only shake when you're ready: drinking, cutting, bad loves, self-hatred.
And there's no permanent detox, there's only situations of consent and choice. The first rule of shedding skin is survival. Once you're past that stage, then you have more resources and options to draw on.

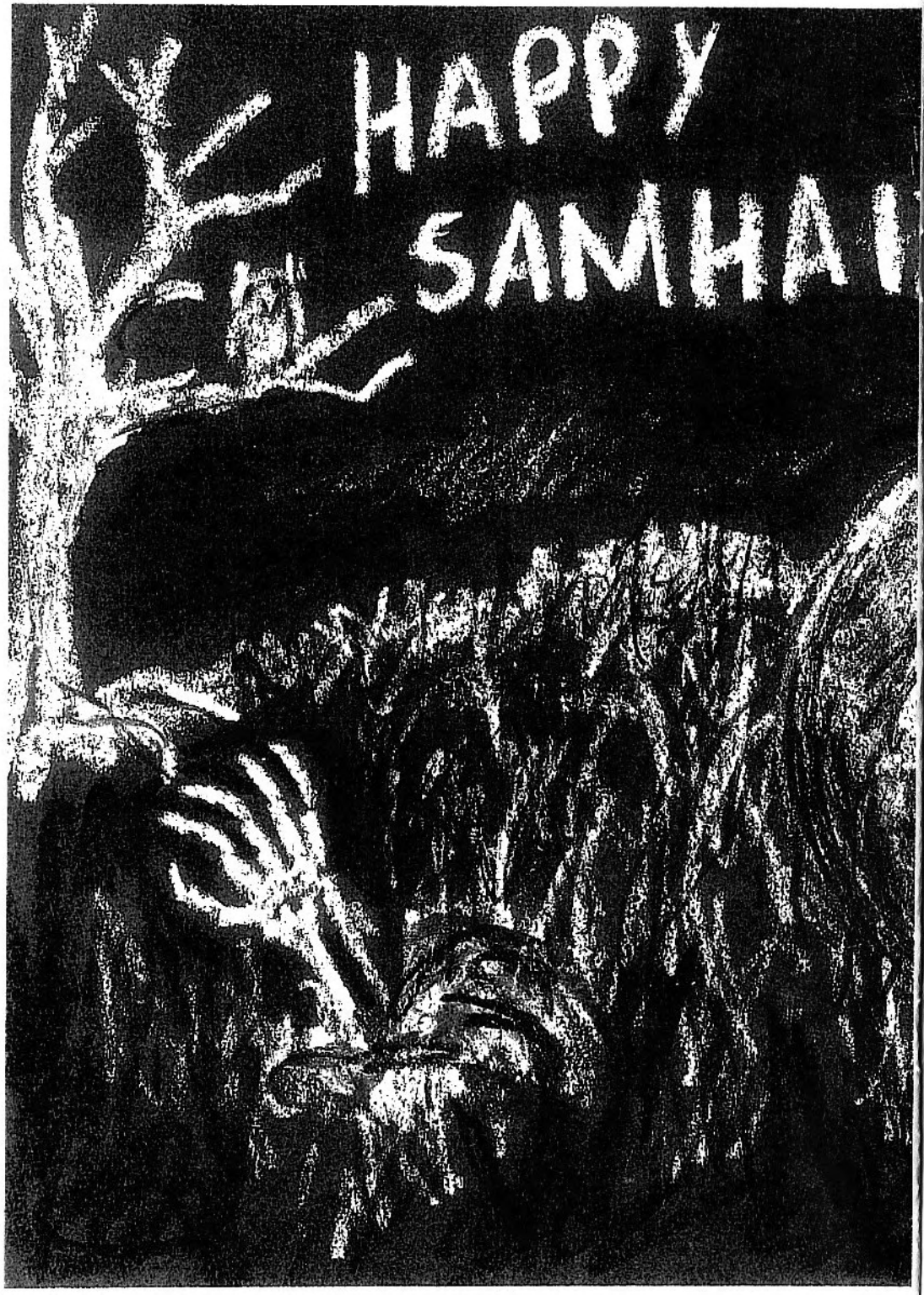
I'm still figuring out how much I can ask for (and, more importantly, what I truly believe I deserve). I am aware of how people who have little, often expect little / off-cuts – sometimes it's like a re-education to realize that is just self-abnegation (I'm detangling threads from my background). It can take a while for good fortunes, for harvests, for reaping in the hard work you sow, to really stick and feel *right* (and necessary).

I'm still working out if alienation has made me 'split' (into neuroses), and what 'presence' feels like. Being in a tight circle with people I trust usually feels like presence. Here, I feel like less something with an identity, and more something with a vibrancy.

Queer paganism for me makes ultimate sense. As if energy / spirit could be contained in a two-gender box system! I feel like I still have a lot of gender junk clogging up my imagination. I'm interested in working past that. There are not enough resources on this (myths, gods/goddesses, cultures, rituals). A nice book to consider for lovers (poly and not; hanfasting and not) is Raven Kaldera & Tannin Schwartzstein's *Inviting Hera's Blessing: Handfasting and Wedding Rituals*. It has rituals by queer groups, a sensitivity around the need for new myths and practices, and is a nice romantic read. (Raven is a trans-man. He also author's the awesome witchy astro-guidebook, *Pagan Polyamory*).

In terms of shedding skins, and identities and patterns, I have learnt, for me, that it happens all the more better when I say goodbye gratefully. Even the shitty things I'm leaving behind, they have all in some way served me. I still carry my threads and my little parcel tags, and it's personal history (as well as spiritual development?) Maybe I am more ready to let things go when I do it grounded, not angry. I always try and make that my bottom line. (And I can only spell-cast from a power-full position, not one that is defensive, or seething, or bitter, or afraid). As an activist, it can be hard to let things go: especially ongoing struggles. But, folks, we are entering the rest period. Take care of yourself.

(These thoughts were inspired by a tarot card reading I did earlier with a Motherpeace deck, drawing my present as the intoxicating Death card).
You can contact me here, **www.redchidgey.net**


HAPPY