

Is it a urge we all have?
A desire to create waves
A dream to run wild and free
What stops us?
Are we scared of what we may find?
Are we afraid of who we may become?
'A Year in the Wilderness' collects words and images
from the first twelve issues of my 'Wild' zine plus specials
created for zine fairs over the same period
These are the things I found whilst wandering off the
beaten track
These are my thoughts on a life in constant flux

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A YEAR IN THE WILDERNESS

"I think true wilderness can still be found, but it's hard to reach and dangerous when you get there, which is probably why it still exists".
– Michelle Paver

This book is for everyone who struggles to express themselves and those who help them find their way. As a born introvert there were so many people who showed more faith in me than I'll ever have. To Paul, Kerry and William at In-Situ. And Moz at That 0282 Place. To Lyn for the years of friendship and putting up with my northern mumble! To Crash and Jess for the zine love. And to Helen for the loan of the masks, new 'ways of seeing' and for not looking at me as though I was warped when I showed her that first issue!

SAN, BRIERFIELD DECEMBER 2019

"Reality doesn't impress me. I only believe in intoxication, in ecstasy, and when ordinary life shackles me, I escape, one way or another. No more walls". - Anais Nin



GENESIS

'Wild' came from a desire to expand my horizons. I'd done a series of 'Torso' zines which focussed on how my body was changing. From there it was a natural progression to ask the question: if my body is ageing what is happening to the places which surround me? Are they also showing signs of dereliction? And is this impacting on how I feel about both my body and the outside world.

'Wild' was a way of talking about living on the outskirts. About how the town I live in seems to be growing and encroaching on the green perimeter. Overstepping boundaries. And how it was strange that other places had become wasteland. Unwanted and unloved. It was about promises and failure.

'Wild' can also be taken as a travelogue; these are the places I've been. It can be seen as a comment on wastefulness and unrest – these are the things that we've left behind. Some vulgar scrawl and discarded clothes. Have our lives become so transient? This is what we do to survive. This is what we do to escape.

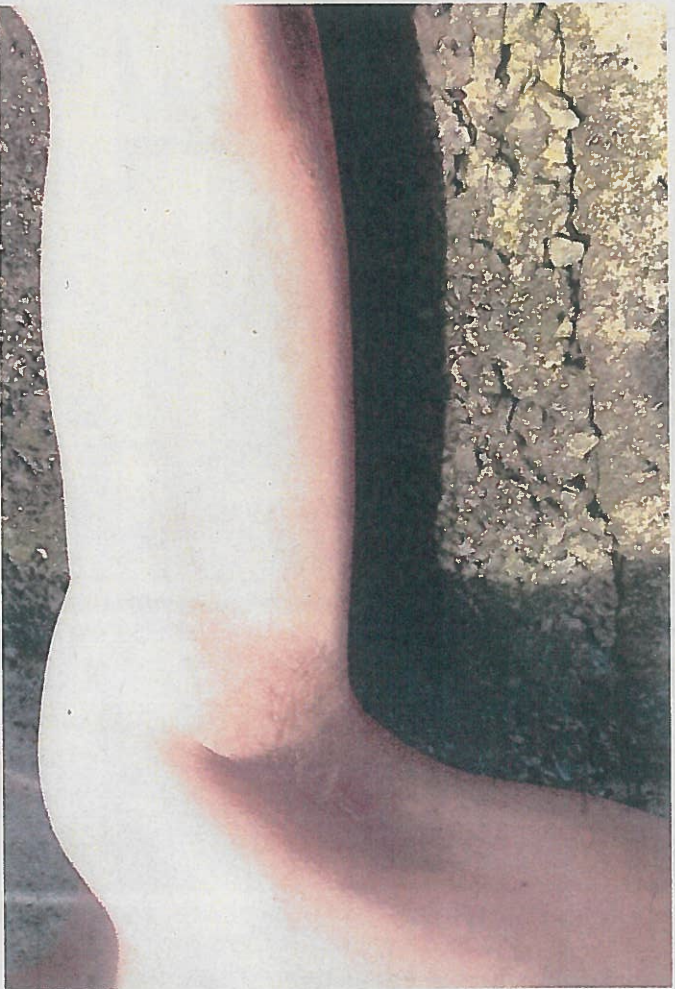
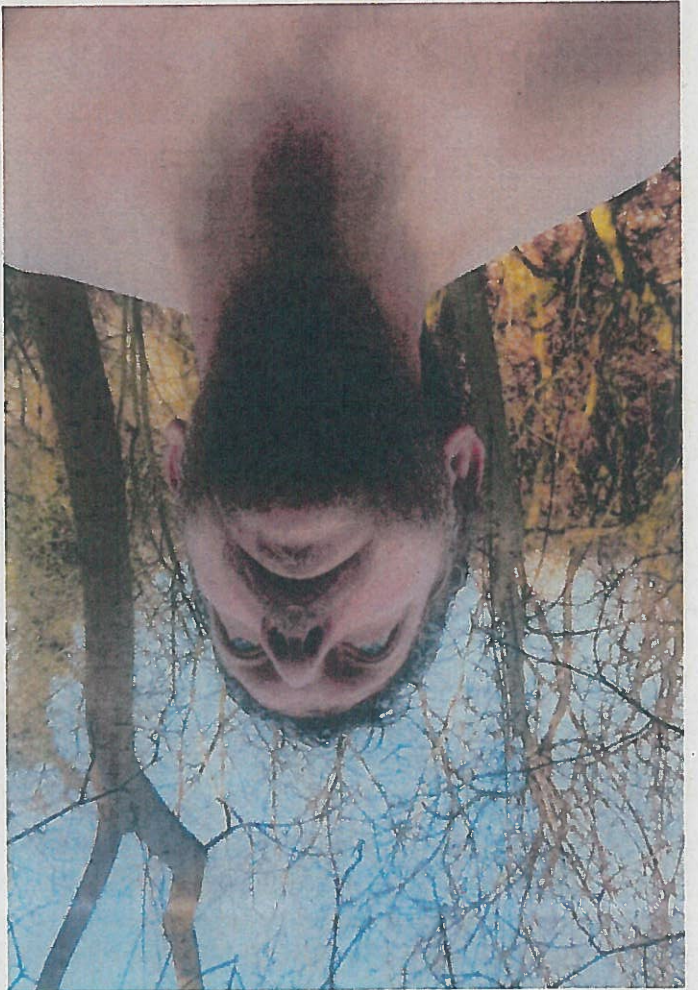
'Wild' is also about abandonment of childhood and normality. I wanted to touch on the fairy tale aspect of 'the woods'. I've always been drawn to the idea that the woods are a living, breathing and transformative place. So why are they always seen as dark and malevolent? Places where people go missing or end things. Why such evil when I see magic?

'Wild' will always be about contrasts. The photos themselves taken whilst walking to and from the places of isolation. It is as much about disarray as it is beauty. Mixing the graffiti of the motorway flyovers with lushness. Earth, heaven and hell. All part of me. All fighting each other to see which one will survive.

REVELATIONS:

The beast's habitat was in constant flux –
the men had dreams
Gone were the brook and green aplenty
Now it could only find factory, artificiality
A constant throb
A constant fear [of grey]
Where could freedom now be found?
The monster howled in vain
Why did progress always bring abandonment?
Life inconsequentially falling away
Colours fading in the hopelessness
Was nothing worth saving? – he felt alone again
Did he not exist? – no, to them he was nothing
How long had he been amongst them now? – it
felt like eternity
They preached a future of change, of ideas
How was this the answer when it meant extinction?
The beast howled again
In this age of enlightenment the men fell silent

The man felt the woods come alive.
It's spirit was all around him, beckoning.
That groan as the wind blew through the branches.
A rhythmic sway and creak that sent seeds groundward.
The creatures call killed the silence.
Stopped any resistance and made him go deeper.
He never saw it is as a transformative thing in itself but he felt 'something'.
What was it exactly?
An energy?
He wasn't sure if he believed in magic.
He wasn't sure he believed in much more than the moment.
As the man undressed he saw that he was erect.
He found it funny that throughout his life he'd been told where to go
and what to do but never how to love.
Or how to be.
Life lessons always came in vague terms that were impossible to measure.
It was about fear and sin.
It was about blasphemy
But he'd found a way to escape, to question and to shed his skin.
He found joy in being willing to let time leave its mark.
Open to making himself appear vulnerable.
Desire came through death.
It came in the changing seasons.
It came in dreams crashing.
The man felt such wonder as he dived into the moonlit pool.
And complete as he caught the beast's reflection when he surfaced.



STRANGER
Than
Paradise







The prophet knew his time was at hand and
wished that he could change his path
He wasn't set for this - he no longer believed
But he knew his death must come

Through sword, through semen

Through the thoughts in his head that made him feel evil
Through the thoughts in his head that made him aroused
Why couldn't they see he wasn't one of them?

He looked at the vibrant green with such awe
And went deeper into the wilderness

He knew that it was useless and they would find him

Hunt him down and demand words

Hunt him down and demand sacrifice

But for now he walked further, naked

Cherishing each secluded breath

Each nettled step that proved he was human

Each sacred second there before darkness enveloped

So what defines us?

What defiles us?

Is it the dust and dirt that surrounds?

Products of this harsh world

This concrete land where we live

Maybe the desire is always there?

And with that a certain devilment

To stray off the beaten track

To stray and feel sheer joy

To stray never to return

No longer tied to the past

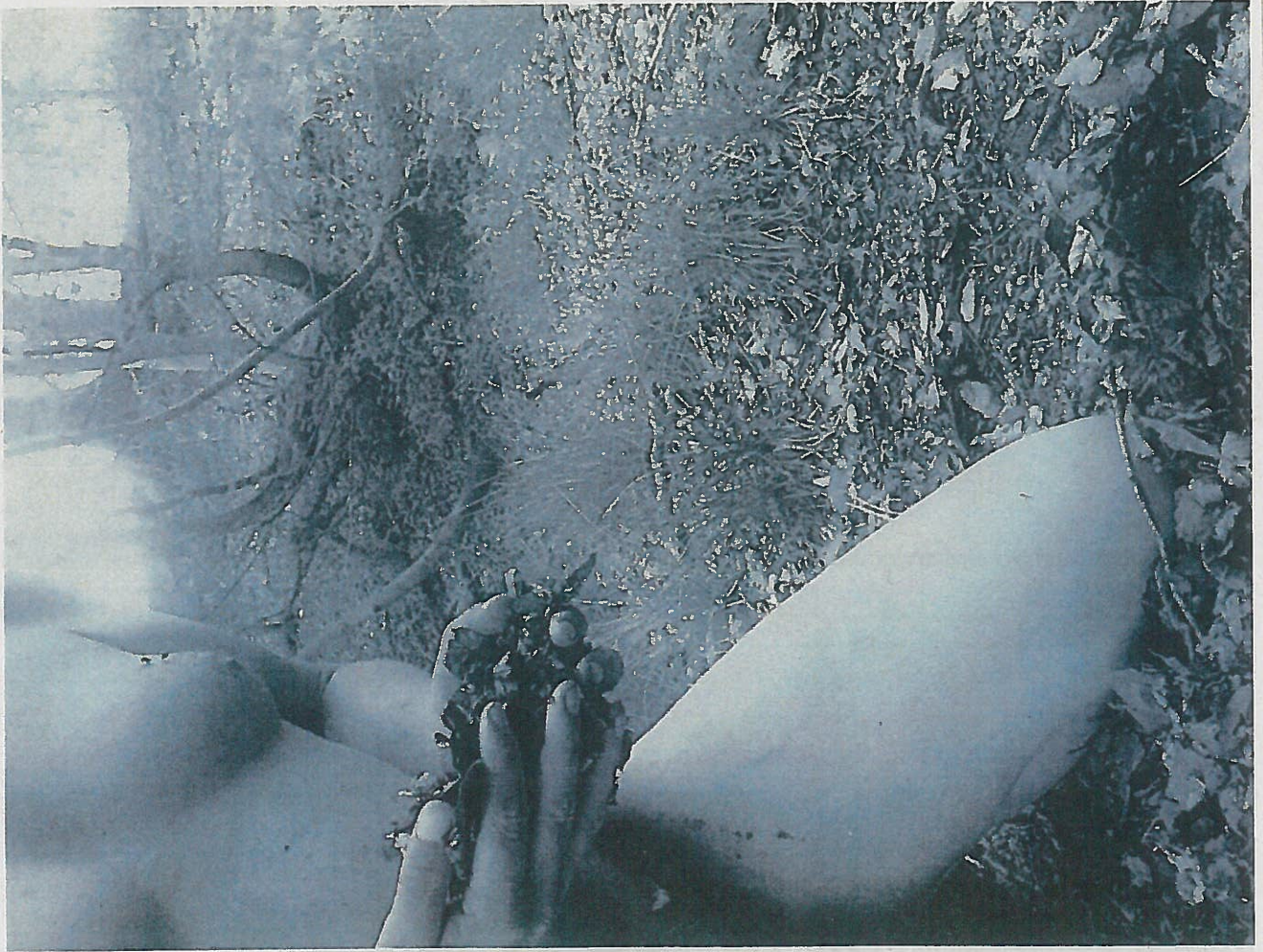
No longer following some tired doctrine

But for once acting wild and carefree

Changing beyond all recognition

Fluid and formless

Shedding skin without any concern



Is the crumbling concrete a sign?
To remind us we are bound to change
Grow old and weak
Bend and break down
But also to experience new things
With a new wisdom of sorts
What do you see other than just a body?
A male body
Not some edifice
Not something to be repulsed by
Human?
Does anyone really know what that means?
Is it just another label to define how we
should act?
To care or abuse in equal measure?
To know about death and realise that it is
on the horizon
To have no fear
But to walk ghost like through the ruins
Quiet, ashen and unashamed



The man knew he was heretic
He wanted to fuck the world over
He didn't care for anyone let alone himself
He realised that there was no hope here
He used to believe in heaven but somehow got lost along
the way
Through the sex that they found abhorrent
Through the course words that he spat out
What was heaven anyway?
A place for cunts who died without sinning
Or were foolish enough to atone for their desires
He imagined it as endless drone
He imagined it full of people who he used to hate with a passion
Lame and insipid - it felt more like hell to him
There must be vibrancy below?
There with those who had been condemned as worthless
Those who over time had defiled scripture
He knew he would feel their agony
He knew he would feed off their hate
He knew they would become tribe
He knew he would soon find love



They were bits of kids kicking stuff around the
same neighbourhood
Early Seventies babies who ventured everywhere
together
Down across the railway line to the waterfall or
across the golf course; further and further afield
Adolescence made them insular and had them hanging
round street corners
They grew listless and lustful
They tried to look cool
They tried to remember why they liked each other
They lost touch
Maybe it's just one of those things. Time chose
their friends but over time they needed to separate
Go their own way and have new experiences
Happy to know they had left their mark on each
other's dreams

Our lives have become boarded up
Shattered and fleeting
Desperate with no sign of progress
Only in terms of time; day in, day out
Like some pointless procession
Point A to point B and back again
Repeat, repeat, repeat
Endless, endless, endless
We've become like animals; zombies
Uncontrolled
Only stopping to eat and fuck
Eat and leave waste
No sense of what is around
No sense of what is on our doorstep
Dead whilst living in a state of nature
Doomed to live in a state of disarray



So what has been left behind
Left for others to find
Some scrawled tag to say I was here
I have existed
I have made my mark
For once I have had my say
Fuck this, fuck that, fuck you
It's hard to know how we'll feel when we
reach that moment we have to depart
Regrets and what ifs mingling with warmness
Memories of times we burned bright
Not worried about what lies ahead
Realising that those left will come and go
Roaming through the woods and pastures
Milling around the arcades
Trying to make sense of it all
Trying to survive

Out in the woods the creature roams
Isolated just following its own primal instincts
Yet still fearful
Always fearful
But in the distance exotic smells and cacophony
Forbidden desires and chances
A faster heartbeat
Sure it may end up in revulsion
Sure it may end with expulsion from Eden
Sure it may end in nothing
But what is life without thrill?
But what is life without the thought of destruction?
Randomness and non-conformity
The creature looks both ways and steps out of the shadows







They promised us a brave new world.

Said our futures would be bliss.

Abundant, full of silver and chrome.

They gave us wires.

Things that spat out noise.

Things that became tangled and torn.

Things that corroded whilst he tried to escape.

He grew old trying.

He grew tired trying.

The motorway came offering nothing more than greyness and monotony.

He still didn't know where he was headed but could get there faster.

Things crumbled further.

And yet always an oasis in all of this.

There past the concrete and graffiti he found calm.

There near where the Quakers built their bridge he found lushness and wildlife.

Still isolated but now at one with nature.

There he shed his skin.

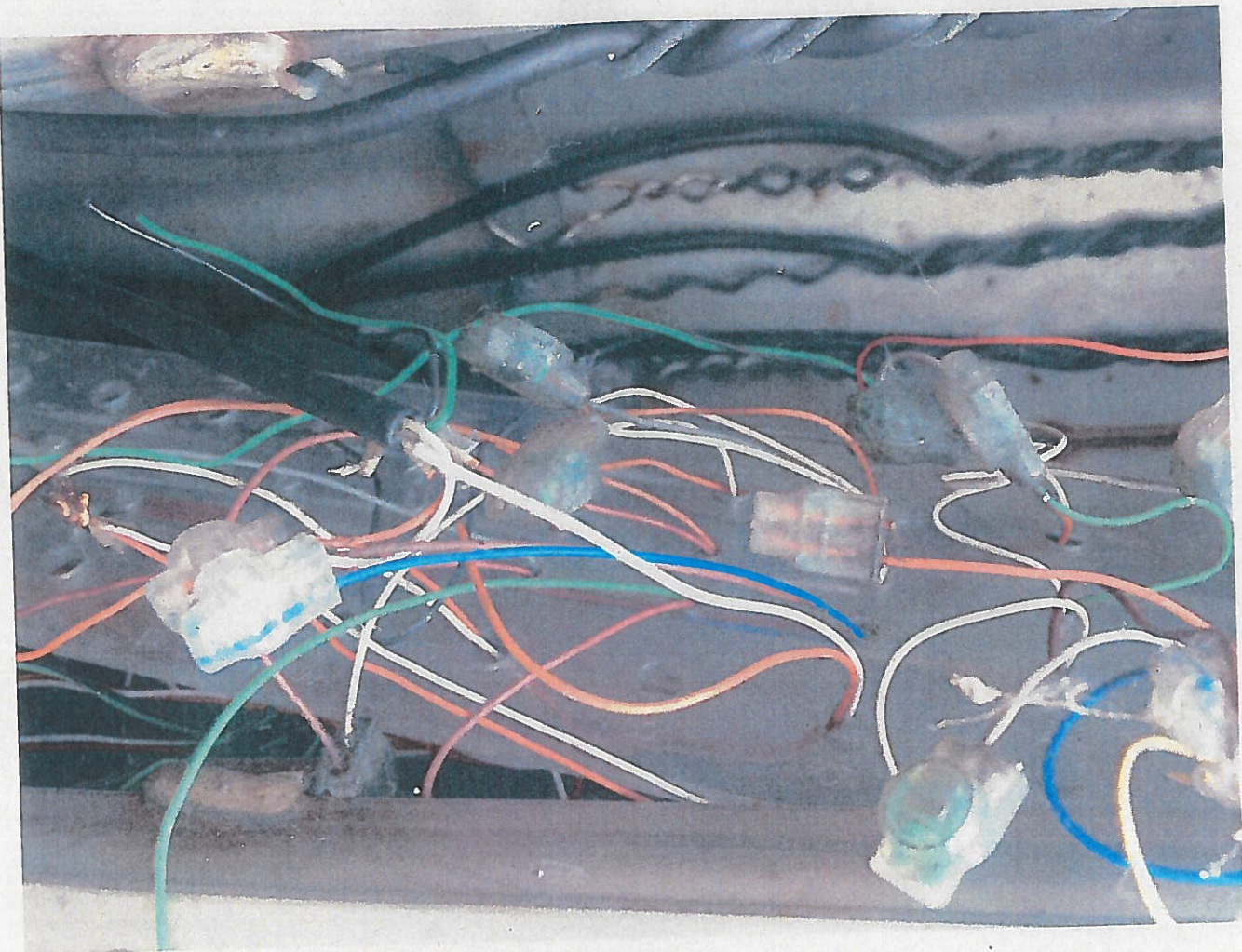
All artificiality gone.

There he smelt wild garlic and felt the warmth on his shoulders.

Felt a powerful resurgent energy.

There at once he became alive.

There, forever, he felt home.



So what does this modern world bring us?
The vibrancy of wild flowers with teenaged blue hues?
Perhaps we realise though that this wonder is short lived?
Our lives have become insignificant.
Our lives are full of cheap kicks and plastic.
Thrown away before the time comes.
Discarded bikes (was our childhood so long ago?)
Discarded prams (we couldn't wait to grow up and have sex.)
Discarded dreams (when did we stop imagining a bright future?)
Despite odd glimpses of colour the lustre has gone.
Replaced only with grime and slogans.
Feeling like we don't belong today.
Feeling slaves to a distorted rhythm.
Feeling nothing but numbness.
Wanting something more than just being here.



