# Respecting "the Medicines":

# Narrating an Aboriginal Identity at Nechi House

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an attempt to explore the dynamics of the therapeutic process at Nechi House, a community residential centre or halfway house for men of aboriginal ancestry. I explore the construction of an *Aboriginal* identity among residents at the House as an issue of context, where, as Gregory Bateson (1979) suggested, "It is the context that fixes the meaning". Aboriginal identity among residents at Nechi House, I argue, represents an intersection of imbricated discursive practices and personal narratives of self within a highly problematic and contentious symbolic socializing space. Space as I am using the concept in this dissertation is presented as analogous to language and speaks to the larger social order.



## Résumé

Ce mémoire tente d'explorer la dynamique du processus thérapeutique à la Maison Nechi; à la fois centre résidentiel communautaire et maison de réinsertion sociale pour hommes de descendance aborigène. J'explore la construction de l'identité *aborigène* chez les résidents de ce centre à titre de composante contextuelle tel que suggéré par Gregory Bateson (1979) lorsqu'il postule "*It is the context that fixes the meaning*". L'identité aborigène des résidents de la Maison Nechi représente une intersection de pratiques discursives imbriquées à des récits personnels de soi dans le contexte hautement problématique et litigieux de l'espace symbolique de socialisation. Ce mémoire présente l'espace comme un concept analogique au langage révélant ainsi un ordre social plus large.

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*Reflections on Indian Residential School*

*"You young people, you have that daylight in your minds. Us, they put curtains around our minds. They tried to keep us in the dark. They wanted to keep us stupid, make us their slaves. But you young people, you have that daylight in your minds. We're going to be okay."*

*William Wilfrid Brass, Saulteaux Elder and Veteran, Key Reserve, February 1998*

This thesis is dedicated to my late father who passed away on April 29, 1998.

He showed me the true value of a good story by living one.

# List of Figures

# Table of Contents

# Introduction

> "Medicines could even be powerful words. Words that move you. Words that make you feel something. Those are powerful. That's medicine." [JB 10/10/97]

Jack, a resident at Nechi House, offered this answer in response to my question about the meaning of "the Medicines" in group psychotherapy – the Nechi Community Circle.[1] "The House", located in Montreal, Quebec, is a community residential centre, otherwise known as a half-way house. It is a unique setting that provides exclusive residential and intensive psychotherapeutic services for men of aboriginal ancestry on parole from the Canadian federal and Quebec provincial prison systems. Since it receives a culturally diverse clientele of aboriginal men, ranging from Inuit, Mohawk to Saulteaux (as in the case of Jack), the counselling staff relies on a pan-Amerindian rhetoric to construct a sense of community among residents. In the context of collective therapy sessions, "group work," is aimed at providing a means for residents to help each other through the (often intense) sharing of confessional personal narratives. It is hoped that in the process, residents may see themselves in each other and learn to reflect more deeply on the problems they face in their lives. Those residents who respond positively to this process will, ideally, learn to control their addictions, stop their criminal behaviour and leave the revolving door of prison.

"The Medicines" are also a critical part in this process. In the Nechi Community Circle "the Medicines" generally refer to the presence of cedar, sage, sweetgrass, tobacco and other organic material used in smudging, a form of ritual cleansing with smoke. Based on my fieldwork observations, the rhetoric surrounding "the Medicines" is a way of cultivating an ancestral spiritual presence in the "group" and teaches the residents the precepts that, according to counselling staff, are fundamental to every aboriginal community – caring, sharing, honesty and respect.

But not all residents hear the counselling rhetoric in the same way. For some, it appears to be largely meaningless and vague. In an interview a Mohawk resident from a community

[1] Nechi House is a pseudonym. The names and initials of residents and staff have also been changed to protect their identities. Jack, however, specifically requested that I use his real name.

near Montreal, for example, offered a comparison of "the Medicines" in the House as opposed to what he learned at home from a culturally knowledgeable mentor.

> TM: When I go [home to my community] - when I work with my Elder - he'll give me medicine. Like, we'll go out and he'll help me. He'll pick it and he'll explain it to me - what it's for and when to use it. Like, if it's for something when you're sick, he'll tell you everything about it. But over here [the counsellors] don't tell you nothing about it.
> GB: So, generally, when they're talking about medicines, what do think they're talking about?
> TM: I don't know. Sometimes I think they don't even know what they're talking about.
> [TM 10/18/97]

For this Mohawk resident, the meaning of medicines is linked to a specific context of tutelage – a set of personal memories of wandering in the country with another community member who had more knowledge than he did about medicinal plants in the environment. But Jack, the resident mentioned earlier, did not have such personal memories. He had been adopted out of his family and separated from his community at a young age. This early rupture was a source of despair and loss. The House, then, acted as a surrogate aboriginal community for Jack, giving him a space of belonging. Not surprisingly, he was therefore more receptive to its rhetoric. As a whole, Jack seemed to respond well to group psychotherapy and had a good relationship with his counsellor. But the Mohawk resident mentioned above was more resistant to the therapy. He did not trust the counselling staff and was quite cynical about the House, even suggesting that it was like an extension of the prison system. Consequently, according to his own reports and those of the counselling staff, he rarely related any personal narratives in group or even in the individual sessions.

The ability of words to move others – the rhetorical force of language – is central to the point I am making here. In the case of Jack, words are medicines and have the power to heal; they moved him from his place of suffering and on to a path of recovery and renewal. Yet for the other resident, the counselling rhetoric is nothing more than nonsense. He consistently resisted the therapeutic interventions directed at him. The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the reasons behind this state of ambivalence and locate the points of disjuncture among, not only the two residents cited above, but also others who reflected similar ambivalent responses to the counselling rhetoric. In retrospect, the possible reasons for this ambivalence

and diversity in attitudes were made apparent to me very early on in my fieldwork – during the process of writing my research proposal. While attempting to construct a proposal that faithfully depicted the work of Nechi House, a counsellor and myself engaged in a seemingly innocuous semantic argument. This struggle over meaning concerned whether the House was an "institution" within the bureaucracy of corrections or, as she asserted, an autonomous "therapeutic community". Needing to get on with my fieldwork I deferred to her wishes; the House was depicted in my research proposal as a therapeutic community. But the issue was never resolved. As I will show in this dissertation, the spatial identity of the House – whether it is an institution or a community – is a matter of subjective interpretation, and critical to whether residents resist or subscribe to the counselling rhetoric.

This dissertation is an attempt to explore the dynamics of the therapeutic process at Nechi House. I explore the construction of an *Aboriginal* identity among residents at the House as an issue of context, where, as Gregory Bateson (1979) suggested, "It is the context that fixes the meaning". Aboriginal identity among residents at Nechi House, I argue, represents an intersection of imbricated discursive practices and personal narratives of self within a highly problematic and contentious symbolic space. Space here is presented as being analogous to language and speaks to the larger social order.

An excerpt from Bruner's (1986) examination of the contextual nature of meaning as it relates to historical representations of Native Americans in ethnographic writing sheds some light on my own research into the therapeutic ideology[2] and practices of Nechi House.

> Stories give meaning to the present and enable us to see that present as part of a set of relationships involving a constituted past and a future. But narratives change, all stories are partial, all meanings incomplete. There is no fixed meaning in the past, for with each new telling the context varies, the audience differs, the story is modified, and as Gofrain writes . . . "retellings become foretellings." We continually discover new meanings. (Bruner 1986: 153)

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[2] Throughout this thesis I refer to the House's therapy as *ideology*. Ideology, I am well aware, is a heavily loaded term with some unsavory connotations. But any therapeutic practice, religious or social movement that asks that it members subscribe to a selective point of view of the world is, in fact, ideological. The definition of ideology I prefer to use comes from Ricoeur for whom ideology is a means to social integration:
"Ideology is a function of the distance that separates the social meaning from an inaugural event which must nevertheless be repeated. Its role is not only to diffuse the conviction beyond the circle of the founding fathers, so as to make it the creed of the entire group; its role is also to perpetuate the initial energy beyond the period of effervescence." (Ricoeur 1981: 225 as quoted in Moore 1990: 100)

Bruner's article is useful to my perspective in two ways. First of all, he demonstrates that narratives are products of *discourse* or "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault 1972: 49). Seen in this way, a discourse as a medium of thought has overarching economic, political and social ramifications. Narratives, on the other hand, are a means of temporalizing human experience in the world and constitute social reality as much as they seem to transparently reflect it. In short, narratives are linguistic means to historicizing ends (Kerby 1991: 4). That is, narratives serve to construct a sense of temporal order over human experience and give meaning to the past and direction for the future. But because of the tendency of discursive practices to change or be replaced over time, narrative constructions of reality and the meanings drawn from them can be highly contextual and transitory.

Bruner demonstrates these points by showing the discursive changes in ethnographies of Native Americans over a span of decades. Specifically, the "stories" these ethnographies tell about the fate of Native Americans differ dramatically between pre- and post-World War Two epochs. For example, Bruner writes, "In the 1930's narrative it was the past that pervaded the present; in the 1970's narrative it is the future" (1986: 140). Anthropological writings of Native American peoples in earlier decades reflected a sense of doom in regard to their cultural distinctiveness and the supposed inevitability of their gradual assimilation into dominant North American society. In contrast, in later decades ethnographic writing portrayed Native American communities and peoples as resisting this process of assimilation and even demonstrating a remarkable cultural resilience in the face of North American hegemonic forces.

This issue of the contextuality of meaning figures prominently – albeit at a personal level – in my own research into the therapeutic practices of Nechi House. Here, the clinical staff's therapeutic interventions rely on a resident's narratives of self filtered through a set of ideas and themes in order to generate meanings directed towards healing and renewal.

Secondly, Bruner's article underscores the point that colonial history and anthropological writings about Native American cultures and peoples have had a powerful effect on their representations through history and even today. Since anthropological investigations of

Native Americans began in the nineteenth century they have become the objects of an Euro-American cultural gaze that "Others" and then police their cultural identities. It could be argued that anthropological writings have spawned a type of discourse that now encompasses and subjugates not just Native Americans but other world populations as well. The discourse is that of *Aboriginality*, specifically, that there exists an internally homogenous category of peoples in the world distinguished by having been collectively "Othered" or socio-politically marginalized from nation-state populations.[3] Peoples denoted as aboriginal, then, are a discursive product of anthropologists, colonial history and bureaucratic and governmental policy. What is interesting is how this discourse of Aboriginality has spilled over into wider society, including the media and popular culture, and has been reified to the extent that it now appears to constitute a commonly accepted social fact. Within the Canadian judicial system and the discursive practices of Nechi House, aboriginal is an inclusive but largely non-descript bureaucratic label that envelops a diverse and over-represented segment of the incarcerated Canadian population.

For Nechi House, a vein of ideas and themes within the discourse of Aboriginality – often reproduced by counselling staff as factual statements – has led to the development of a highly generic therapeutic ideology for dealing with a culturally, historically, linguistically, and personally diverse group of men. Briefly, these discursive statements romanticize Aboriginality as an essential, natural and pure source of spiritual energy and primal wisdom. Counsellors at the House filter narratives of self through these discursive statements to cultivate meanings directed towards personal growth and spiritual renewal in a resident.

In investigating the therapeutic practices of Nechi House I discovered a strong correspondence between narratives of self and these discursive statements; that is, many residents did articulate their narratives through the ideas and themes presented by counselling staff. But I was more perplexed by how some residents subscribed to the discursive practices

[3] My assertion here is not that "aboriginal" peoples do not exist nor that "Aboriginality" is an inauthentic source of identity. Rather, what I am pointing out is that the locally constructed cultural identities of some of the world's human populations have been historically subsumed within a larger body of knowledge. In short, "aboriginal" and "Aboriginality" are historical social constructions.

of the House while other residents resisted it. This matter puzzled me for a very long time. It was only after interviewing a group of residents and reflecting upon their views of the House that I came to see that one resident's subscription and another's resistance may be explained in their 'reading' of the House as a particular kind of social space. That is, due to the House's bureaucratic location in the regime of the Canadian judicial system, and the persistence of criminalized activity (as seen by staff) among some residents, in its character and practices the House can be perceived as either a space for healing and renewal, or a space for further incarceration and disciplining. Thus, residents read and interpret the House as a kind of *spatial text* – where space "possesses an internal structure (a sense) as well as an ability to project an interpretation of being in the world – that is, to refer beyond immediate action and experience" (Moore 1996: 87). The residents' spatial readings of the House – as different from or similar to correctional institutions – thereby determine their receptivity to its discursive practices and their own narrative commitment to it.

In some ways, then, in his focus on historical changes in anthropological paradigms of Native American peoples, Bruner has only told part of the story of narrative and discourse. The other part of the unfolding of narrative and discourse is their contextual confluence: space. Space must be considered as both the product and the producer of social interaction (Pred 1990: 10). In the last two decades, many social theorists have identified spatiality as a neglected and under-studied dimension of social relations (see for example, Giddens 1979: 202). For example, Foucault writes,

> Space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power . . . I think it is somewhat arbitrary to try to dissociate the effective practice of freedom by people, the practice of social relations and the spatial distributions in which they find themselves. If they are separated, they become impossible to understand. Each can only be understood through the other. (Michel Foucault 1984: 252, 246, as quoted in Pred 1990: 4)

I will cite an incident from my fieldwork to illustrate this point. Once, when I asked a counsellor about the possibility that those residents who seemed to benefit from the therapy were only responding to the context of the House, she responded, ". . . that would have you believe there is some magical quality about the House, and I don't believe that. We don't cast a

spell over them." [BL 06/23/98]. However, when examined carefully we can see that the House's therapeutic ideology, forms of intervention, and tendency to waver between healing and disciplining poles[4] constitute a spatial economy of imbricated discursive practices and statements; their effects are not exclusive to residents. Rather, they are manifested in the totality of the structure of the House and all of its members, especially the staff. In other words, the magical contagion is ubiquitous.

In this thesis, I will attempt to demonstrate that a resident's narrative commitment to the discursive practices of Nechi House is determined by his reading of its spatial text. I use the term "reading" quite consciously: for space, as I am using the concept here, is understood as a "text," composed of sense with reference, meaning with action. Therefore, residents and staff are viewed in this kind of interpretive framework as social actors – agents – who are able to choose and enact their subscription to discursive practices. Finally, Aboriginality as a discursive source of personal and collective identity is complex and rooted in a response to the hegemony of the Canadian State. Specifically, the personal and collective meanings drawn from the discourse of Aboriginality may be contextually appropriate to historical circumstances and spatial settings.

**Nechi House & Fieldwork Research**

Between May 1997 and June 1998 I conducted ethnographic fieldwork[5] at Nechi House. Over the summer, between the months of early June and mid-August 1997, I continuously sat through group psychotherapy sessions (Nechi Community Circle), took part in a week long intensive therapeutic camp off the island of Montreal, and on one occasion served as an escort to a resident who had to return to his home community for the funeral of a

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[4] I recognize that the perception of this wavering is a matter of subjective interpretation. Counsellors acknowledged that the House seems to shift between a therapeutic community and a punitive institution. A set of opinions among interviewed residents, as I will show in a later chapter, reflects this vacillation.

[5] I should also mention here that I had worked at the House for nine months the year before I started my fieldwork. I was an employee within its administrative office. Part of my duties included conducting prison visits on behalf of the House. In the course of my employment I visited most federal institutions in the Atlantic and Eastern provinces. Thus, some of my understanding of the House and its relationship to the Canadian correctional system stems from this experience.

family member. In the fall, between early October and mid November 1997, I conducted structured interviews with residents whom I had gotten to know fairly well and who, in turn, I felt had developed a level of trust with me. In June 1998 I finished my fieldwork by conducting interviews with two of the House's counsellors, both of whom were key and senior members of the clinical team.

At the time of my research Nechi House was located on the fourth floor of a warehouse style building in a semi-industrial area within the city of Montreal, Quebec.[6] The House has been in operation since 1988, growing steadily in physical size, as well as in political and social stature over the last decade. Further, Nechi House's custodial powers over many of its residents has increased in recent years; that is, the Canadian Solicitor General's Office and Quebec Government's Ministry of Justice have both granted the House increased parole supervision responsibilities – "a golden seal of approval" a staff counsellor informed me.

Nechi House has an eighteen bed capacity and accepts men of aboriginal ancestry who have been released on parole from a federal or provincial correctional institution. It also accepts men who are awaiting sentence or are serving a conditional sentence of which time spent in a treatment centre environment is a requirement. Individuals requiring some type of social services intervention, i.e. alcohol, drug, or substance abuse problems, also come to the House on a private referral basis.

The fact that Nechi House exists at all is due to a particular niche it fulfills within the mandate of the federal and provincial correctional systems. The House provides a psychotherapeutic service for an over-represented segment of the incarcerated population: aboriginal men. The House opened in 1988, the same year a government task force, assigned to investigate this problem, released its findings.[7]

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[6] Since this research was concluded they have vacated this premise and moved off the island of Montreal. Moving further into the country, according to what I had been told by and heard discussed among administrative and counselling staff, was a long-term goal of the House.

[7] *Final Report: Task Force on Aboriginal Peoples in Federal Corrections*, Canada, Solicitor General, Ministry Secretariat (1988). It is quite possible that the founding of the House was in response or is related to this report. Unfortunately, due to a breakdown in my fieldwork relationship with the administrative staff I was not able to gather any detailed information on the House's history.

The residents at the House represent a highly diverse composition of cultural, geographic, legal, linguistic, personal and socio-economic backgrounds. Most of the residents speak French, English or sometimes both official languages. Algonquin, Attimatek, Cree, Innu, Inuit, Micmac, Mohawk, Naskapi and even some Plains cultural groups have been represented at the House. Many of the residents speak their own indigenous language. Occasionally, residents will affiliate with each other on the basis of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, sometimes to the exclusion of other residents. Once in a while, a resident from a southern community may even hold racial prejudices against other aboriginal groups, as with Algonquins towards Inuit (or vice versa). A few residents sometimes even distinguish themselves based on whether they came from a federal institution. Doing time in a federal institution implies a "more serious" offence and a longer prison sentence – not less than two years. Finally, most residents are strongly affiliated with their Native communities. However, some residents are from urban settings and have weaker associations to their communities. In short, a sense of compounded diversity among residents is the rule, not the exception, at the House.

**Some Reflections**

My interest in the Nechi House as a form of space was the result of a disjuncture between what I observed about the House and what I heard in the words of residents and staff. My initial knowledge of the House was drawn from nine months of employment in its administration office. I still recall the first time I visited the House because I wandered around the street looking for it. I was at the right address but the House's identity simply was not obvious to me. Eventually I found the intercom, buzzed it, and was let in to my new place of work. However, over the subsequent months my understanding of the therapy and the practices associated with it remained largely limited and superficial (and still does, to a great extent). Further, I never really got to know any of the residents, unless they did something "memorable", such as when one poor individual fell out of his bedroom window and found the

quick way down to the street four floors below. Amazingly, he survived and recovered. I still remember his face and his name.

When I later began my fieldwork, however, the House's administration office became a distant and foreign place: some of the staff had changed but the furniture was the same and the work was not much different. But it felt very different. There was no continuity in my involvement within this space. Over the following weeks, the group therapy room, the hallways, the kitchen and the counsellors' offices gradually became more comfortable and familiar. And, as one of the residents told me in an interview, the residents became curious about me: "Is he friendly?" "He's doing research on us?! " "What does he want?" About a month into my fieldwork, during one group therapy session, I engaged in a discussion with a resident. I must have said something that moved him. After "group" he asked me, "Are you a Doctor of Philosophy?" I was baffled, a little flustered and somewhat flattered. I told him no, then tried to explain to him who I was and what I was up to. Then he asked me where I thought he was on the "Medicine Wheel". I was confused but searched for an answer. I suggested that his healing was not something measurable by some chart. Rather his healing was something self-determined and subjective. largely based on how he was feeling about himself. He seemed a little dissatisfied with my answer. Later, I told a counsellor about this exchange and she felt my answer was quite appropriate. By this time I had a sense that the House – its ideology, its people, its practices, and its spaces – were easier for me to navigate, that I had gained a familiarity with its "culture".

Pierre Bourdieu (1977) discusses a view of culture that is fitting here. He writes,

> It is significant that 'culture' is sometimes described as a map; it is an analogy which occurs to an outsider who has to find his way around in a foreign landscape and who compensates for his lack of mastery, the prerogative of the native, by the use of a model of all possible routes. The gulf between this potential abstract space, devoid of landmarks or any privileged centre . . . and the practical space of journeys actually being made, can be seen from the difficulty we have in recognizing familiar routes on a map or town-plan until we are able to bring together the axes of the field of potentialities and the 'system of axes linked unalterably to our bodies, and carried about with us wherever we go,' as Poincare puts it, which structures space into right and left, up and down, in front and behind. (1977: 2 as quoted in Hirsch and O'Hanlon 1995: 7).

However, Bourdieu's topographical analogy suggests that culture has an observable and objective form which makes it measurable. Given the last decade of the crisis of representation in anthropology, (for example Clifford (1988); Crapanzano (1992); Marcus and Fischer (1986)) a map of culture does not seem to be such a reliable guide for ethnographic experiences. A maxim from Korzybski (found in Epstein and White (1990:2) who borrowed it from Gregory Bateson) states that, "the map is not the territory." As these authors argue this maxim suggests that it is not possible to possess an objective appreciation of reality for two reasons. First, "the meaning we ascribe to an event" is determined "by the network of premises and presuppositions [patterns] that constitute our maps of our world" (ibid.). Second, if an event does not fit into our pre-established patterns it will not survive as memory; it will not become "fact" (ibid.).

I will attempt to describe the ethnographic territory of Nechi House in relation to other ethnographic territories. Nevertheless, by no means do my findings constitute a "map" in Bourdieu's sense above. For House staff (I am presuming) it is also a territory that they have had a hand in creating, and now sustain. Their maps for it are the directing ideology and practices of their brand of healing, an ideology occasionally made concrete in pictographic representations like the "Medicine Wheel" in which, as mentioned above, one disorientated resident attempted to locate himself. For residents, what the House's territory means really depends on their motivations for wandering into its domain. If the purpose was to get of prison, enjoy a little more sunshine and have few good tokes of cheaper weed, the House can be bothersome and very intrusive. But when a resident arrives at Nechi House in the hope of finding freedom from the seeming inescapable cycle of incarceration and a chance for peace of mind, the House can be a frightening and very painful experience.

**Plan and Methodology**

In the following chapters I describe Nechi House as a kind of spatial text, and will argue that a resident's reading of this text determines his receptivity to its discursive practices and

narrative commitment. Further, I will demonstrate that the House's therapeutic ideology adopts ideas and themes from a discourse of Aboriginality that is vital to the maintenance of bureaucratic and hegemonic "regimes of truth" (Foucault 1981).

Chapter One is devoted to theoretical matters, including the elaboration of the interrelation of themes presented in the introduction: discourse, narrative and space as text. Here I provide an overview of Foucault's concept and function of discourse, discussing Aboriginality as a discursive practice. Paul Ricoeur's (1984) ideas on narrative and time are presented through Anthony Kerby's (1991) views on how narratives construct the self. The relationship between narrative and discourse, as presented in my introduction, is clarified. Finally, theories of space are discussed in relation to the argument that many previous theories of spatiality in social analysis have failed to provide a clear account on its significance in shaping social relations. In this regard, I have drawn from the ideas of Henrietta Moore (1996), who provides a theoretically complex and ethnographically rich analysis of Marakwet women in Kenya, showing how the organization of space reinforces the ideology of gender roles.

Chapter Two serves to locate the reader – and myself as ethnographer – within Nechi House. In this chapter I discuss the over-representation of males of aboriginal ancestry in the Canadian correctional system, showing that the House fills a niche within this bureaucratic regime. The House's therapeutic ideology and its rhetoric of "community" are also discussed in relation to a particular discourse of Aboriginality. In addition, I show how the House's day-to-day therapeutic interventions and practices reflect a vacillation between disciplining and healing poles. The direct source for much of my understanding of Nechi House's therapeutic ideology and dilemmas is the counselling staff.

Chapters Three and Four are primarily devoted to the perspectives and views of residents of Nechi House. Chapter Three looks at the area of intertwining of the narratives of residents and the House's discursive practices and statements. Chapter Four explores the House as a "spatial text" and shows how the residents' readings of this "text" determine their decision of how to engage with the House's discursive practices.

The dissertation's Conclusion serves to draw out some final points in my thoughts about Nechi House. I wish to show how the House operates as a locale for the creation and sustaining of a collective and symbolic aboriginal identity – an "imagined community" (Anderson 1991) – in the face of the hegemony of the Canadian State.

# Chapter One
## Theoretical Considerations

According to some philosophers, narrative is a way of situating the self in the world (Kerby 1991; Ricoeur 1984). Narrative is presented in these terms as a means of bringing a sense of temporal order to human experience. Further, the human impulse to narrate one's experiences is a fundamental, possibly universal characteristic of all cultures (White 1984; Mink 1984). But it must also be kept in mind that the act of narration never occurs in a political or social vacuum (Bruner 1986). Specifically, factors concerning both the audience and context influence the direction, intention, and substance of narratives. Shafer (1984) makes this point very clear in reviewing the Freudian psychoanalytic exercise as a form of interpretation jointly crafted between analyst and analysand. He argues that the dialogic exchange between reliable (analyst) and unreliable (analysand) narrators serves to construct the meaning of personal narratives within a therapeutic milieu. The understanding that emerges from all this is clear: narratives are fundamental to our conception of the world and our sense of place within it; yet, all narratives are shaped by the discourse in which they are located. Thus, in these terms, the self can be seen as a product of language.

If we are to fully understand the self as a product of language, that is, as produced in part from the interaction between narrative and discourse, we must pull these two aspects of language apart and understand them as distinct processes. Further, I want to suggest that the locale or space where this interaction between discourse and narrative takes place is by no means a neutral context. As I will show in a later chapter, the spaces of Nechi House together can be understood as a readable text which determines whether residents will narrate themselves in terms of the discursive statements found in its therapeutic ideology and practices. In a very concrete way, then, my treatment of space as text extends the view that the self is the product of language in the sense that space is analogous to language. Alternating and conflicting social practices by residents and staff in the House construct different readings of its space. Likening

space to text implies that all space is problematic and experienced subjectively. This perspective, then, suggests that the narrated self constructed in such a milieu may be particular to that space and vulnerable to the effects of other social spaces. In brief, a self constructed from language – as presented in its widest sense throughout this dissertation – is contextual and transitory.

**Discourse**

The fact that Nechi House exists at all is due in large part to a particular niche it fulfills within the federal and provincial correctional systems; that is, it provides a psychotherapeutic service for an over-represented segment of the incarcerated population: aboriginal offenders. But in order to understand how this niche developed and operates, it is important to approach and understand "Aboriginality", the correctional system, concepts of criminality and even psychotherapy itself as discursive practices which form part of a 'regime of truth'. Michel Foucault (1980) developed a unique definition of power where it is conceived as a positive force in social relations. In this definition of power, a 'regime of truth' is not merely a form of false consciousness. Rather, these regimes teach people to think and act in certain ways. Power within these regimes is an overarching dimension in all social relations.[8]

"Discourse" is an overworked term in social theory. My own use of this term and its theoretical application in this paper explicitly refer to the work of Foucault.[9] Discourse in Foucault's conception may be understood as a style of speech and "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault 1972: 49). However, discourse in Foucault's terms is considerably more complex than this simple definition. Knowledge and power are

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[8] My understanding of Foucault's ideas on 'regimes of truth' is borrowed from John Gledhill's *Power and Its Disguises: Anthropological Perspectives on Politics* (1994)

[9] My understanding of Michel Foucault's ideas comes from some preliminary reading of his work, *Power / Knowledge* (1980) and the Paul Rabinow's abridged compilation of his work, *The Foucault Reader* (1984). However, much of my understanding is credited to an excellent critique of Foucault's work, "Towards an Archaeology of Archaeology" by Christopher Tilley in *Reading Material Culture* (1990). White and Epstein also provide a good overview of Foucault's ideas in their book *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends* (1990: 19–27 & 70–75).

understood as constitutive forces in society. Foucault sees the relation between these two constitutive forces to be so close that he refers to them as power/knowledge:

> We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms; it "excludes", it "represses", it "censors", it "abstracts", it "masks", it "conceals". In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained from him belong to this production. (Foucault 1979: 194).

This radical conception of power is critical to Foucault's conception of discourse, or 'discursive practices'. Power must be conceived as the generative and integrating force in social relations.[10] Through the constitutive effects of the power/knowledge regime all discursive practices have a normalizing effect; that is, they become or a part of "regimes of truth" which utilize scientific means to produce their discursive objects. For example, social work as a "caregiving" profession has gradually widened the circle of the marginal populations it provides care for, i.e. the poor and lower classes, single mothers and welfare recipients, the disabled and refugees. What this process demonstrates about the social work profession is that over time it has increased the number and range of its discursive objects and thereby expanded its network of power. The same argument could be said of any number of academic and professional disciplines, including anthropology, psychology and psychiatry. Ultimately, discursive practices subjugate *docile bodies*[11], inscribing them by means of discursive practices so that they will

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[10] Christoper Tilley (1990: 285-86) reduces Foucault's notion of power to the following points:

1. Power is not a repressive force; it is productive. In other words, without power society would not have flourished as all social relations are about relations of power.
2. The subject is historically and socially contingent, a creation of power relations.
3. Power and knowledge are inseparable, operating in symbiotic relation with each other. Together they cultivate a system of rationality and will to truth.
4. Power is both horizontal and vertical, flowing in multiple directions. That is, power is not located at the top of a hierarchical social order but is instead dispersed.
5. The operative forms of power are historically specific. A single and universal model for power relations does not exist.
6. Power must be understood as a social network of practices and relations. An analogy would be to view power as a layered and interwoven spider's web. Where multiple lines intersect and cross, power relations intensify, but power is never concentrated in one point only.
7. Families, individuals and groups move power upward, effecting the communal, societal, and global exercise of power.
8. Power is a strategy as opposed to an object. As a strategy it is not something which resides in an individual or group
9. The rationality of power is determined by its tactics.
10. Resistance is a counter effect to power. Power is always being resisted. Power and resistance are the polar points of society.

[11] For Foucault, the human body is the irreducible unit of all social relations where power becomes a totalizing web of control over the individual. "The power of the state to produce an increasingly totalizing web of control

conform to desired behaviours in a given social order. These docile bodies are the primary vehicles for the reproduction of a certain order of power. In other words, for Foucault, discursive practices, through a nexus for power relations, create unquestioned truths within which the subjugated body is compelled to operate:

> There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth that operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. (Foucault 1980: 3)

Discursive practices – and the operations of power these practices are linked to – are pervasive in all social relations. All persons are subjugated to regimes of truth or the economy of discourses that constitute relations of power. Finally, modes of surveillance and self-surveillance – 'the gaze'[12] – serve to maintain the subjugation of the body.

In a corresponding manner, Nechi House can be understood as a type of readable space operating as a nexus of power relations, or as an 'economy' of imbricated discursive practices. Some of these imbricated discourses are "Aboriginality", "criminality", "criminology", "counselling psychology", "psychotherapy", "social work" and other 'sciences' of human behaviour and social relations. Even discussions among residents and staff about one's own or someone else's emotional state – that seemingly internal and most 'natural' aspect of our sense of humanness – can be understood as discourses on emotion and emotional discourses which reveal much concerning "the practices essential to social relations" (Lutz & Abu-Lughod 1990: 19). In addition, the very cultural backgrounds of residents may be seen as constituted by culturally specific discursive practices as "aboriginal persons" within a "white"-dominated society.

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is intertwined with and dependent on its ability to produce an increasing specification of individuality." (Rabinow 1984: 22) The human subject is inscribed with discursive practices while modes of surveillance and self-surveillance serve to maintain a state of docility.

[12] Foucault's notion of 'the gaze' was inspired by the nineteenth century British Utilitarian Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, an architectural design for the ideal prison facility where prisoners are kept under perpetual surveillance. Though the physical design never did take any substantial hold in society, the idea has become a fundamental metaphor to understanding the production of knowledges in such domains as the medical profession and psychiatry. The gaze of the professional is used as a strategy to keep the discursive object subjugated to a regime of truth. Gazing also refers to discursive practices that act as forms of cultural surveillance which subjugate the cultural and political aspirations of indigenous populations (Lattas, 1993).

**Aboriginality as Discourse**

It would be extremely difficult in this thesis to discuss all of the discursive practices outlined above within Nechi House. This is the reason I refer to the House as an 'economy of imbricated discursive practices'. For lack of space, I have chosen to focus on what I view as the "discursive niche" that the House fulfills within a 'bureaucratic regime of truth'. The latter refers to the hegemonic order of the Canadian State and the apparatus of the judicial systems – specifically, correctional services – which uphold it. In short, the House exists to address the "needs" of male offenders of aboriginal ancestry who are presently over-represented in the correctional systems. In this situation, the concept and term "aboriginal" is of special interest to me. My interest emerges from the link between what I view as an inclusive but vague bureaucratic "ethnic"[13] category and Nechi House's conscious and strategic deployment of a set of generic beliefs, ideas, and themes – discursive statements – about aboriginal peoples within its therapeutic ideology and practices.

Indeed, the concept of Aboriginality is a social construction that serves as a 'dividing practice', one that has separated (and then marginalized) some members of the world's populations – "aboriginals" – from others, that is, "non-aboriginals". This discourse of Aboriginality then is a practice produced originally by imperial ambition and used by colonial powers when confronting 'the others' whose territory they conquered. When Christopher Columbus happened upon the "Americas" and thought that he had reached India, he initiated a remarkable misnomer which still stands today: the pervasive reference to and self-reference among indigenous populations of the 'New World' as "Indians". But he and his crew did something else. They attempted to describe these strange populations of the New World of the Americas to their fellow countrymen back in the Old World of Europe. They did so in terms that were familiar to them, not to the peoples they encountered. Tzvetan Todorov (1982)

[13] The ethnic category I am referring to here is the one constructed by Canadian State. Aboriginal populations in Canada are designated a special legal status based on historical relationships rooted in the colonial encounters between Europeans and Native populations. In contemporary bureaucratic practice, aboriginal peoples are distinguished from the mainstream Canadian populations as status and non-status Indians (indigenous populations recognized within the meaning of the Indian Act), Inuit, and Metis.

provides an illuminating account of this historical moment. He depicts this encounter between Old World peoples and New World peoples as a process of racial discovery or "alterity", a dialogic exchange between self and other. The knowledge that emerged from these encounters constructed a highly racist portrait of the peoples Europeans had "discovered", and also set the stage for centuries of conquest and colonization.

In the wake of this historical and incidental encounter, reinforced through other historical and less incidental encounters, as well as Enlightenment interests, a knowledge of these others emerged and took hold. A discourse about the discovered others developed. Over the centuries of colonialism and then neo-colonialism, this discourse has served as a way for expansionist and industrial societies to subsume into a framework of knowledge those human populations whose lands were conquered and who appear to be opposed to their own cultural values, economic practices and political systems. Brian Fagan (1984) argues that because of the intense interconnectedness of our present world it is difficult for us to truly fathom the impact of this process of contact and conflict during the period of European discovery. But present-day North American society must contend with the devastating historical, political and social legacies of this period. Consequently, Aboriginality remains the dominant discourse of many developed "First World" nation-states (for example, the Australia, Canada, the United States and other products of colonial history) in their relations with these "historically residual" indigenous populations.

Aboriginality as a discourse has been well studied in Australian anthropology (Archer 1991; Beckett 1988; Hollinsworth 1992; Lattas 1991 and 1993). Lattas (1993), in particular, uses a Foucauldian approach to looking at the discourse of aboriginality among white intellectuals as a type of knowledgeable "gaze" which polices the cultural and political expression of Australian aboriginal populations. Lattas argues that this form of white liberal surveillance defines and delimits the construction of identity amongst a black underclass, and cultivates modes of resistance among this marginalized population.

North American relations between indigenous and non-indigenous populations bear many similarities to the Australian case. For example, Pearce (1988) argues that the American colonial (1750 – 1850) image of the Indian as a savage revealed much more about the colonial populations than it did about the Indian. The stark and violent images were used by the colonists as a means to justify their ruthless slaughter of entire indigenous villages and systematic genocide of entire indigenous nations who stood in their Christian civilizing path. Berkhofer (1979), on the other hand, presents a more diversified portrait of the North American Indian, showing that the knowledge that developed around these indigenous populations came from a number of competing sources: diplomats, missionaries, military men, and men of science. The historical images Berkhofer presents of Native Americans demonstrates that the relationship between the colonizer and colonized was at times deeply ambivalent and contradictory. In his epilogue he writes,

> From this survey of the idea of the Indian over time, two dramatic historic trends emerge. What began as a reality for the Europeans ended as image and stereotype for Whites, and what began as an image alien to Native Americans became a reality for them. For Native Americans the power of the whites all too often forced them to be the Indians Whites said they were regardless of their original social and cultural diversity. (ibid.: 195)

The effect of these ideas was to homogenize the wide cultural and social diversity of indigenous populations. This was the case not just in North America, but, arguably, throughout those areas in the world where indigenous populations were conquered and then subjected to control and regulation – a level of control which may be seen to continue today. Clearly, the Indian as an object of thought in the minds of American colonists and then governments has been and remains a powerful one.

A book that provides a more recent discussion of these themes, also from a discursive analysis perspective, is *Fear and Temptation* (1989) by Terry Goldie. In this important comparative study of the image of the "indigene" in Australian, Canadian, and New Zealand literature, Goldie views the indigenous person as "a semiotic pawn on a chess board under the control of the white signmaker."(ibid.: 10). His metaphor of the images of aboriginal peoples as semiotic pawns can be applied to my analysis of Nechi House. In particular, I conceive the

dialogic / therapeutic practices of the counsellors at the House as a line of strategy and vein of statements within the broader discourse of Aboriginality. Among other things, this discourse appears to uphold the romanticist notion that aboriginal peoples embody a natural and pure source of spiritual wisdom. Kehoe (1990) provides clarity here:

> Thousands of Americans and Europeans believe . . . that American Indians retain a primordial wisdom that could heal our troubled world. American Indians are supposed to be Naturvolker (natural peoples), in contrast to the civilized nations alienated from Nature. Personified as Mother Earth, Nature is the embodiment of life and thus hope of a future.
> . . . Lovejoy and Boas called this idealization "cultural primitivism . . . the discontent of the civilized with civilization." That discontent gives rise to "one of the strangest, most potent, and most persistent factors in Western thought – the use of the term 'nature' to express the standard of human values, the identification of the good with that which is natural." (1965: 7 11-12). (ibid.: 194)

Kehoe illustrates the point that many people in the dominant non-Native society simply expect peoples of aboriginal ancestry to intuitively know (more likely, to feel) the symbols of "their" culture and spirituality. In this view, all Native peoples practice a generic, natural and pervasive set of animistic beliefs sometimes referred to as "Native spirituality". Further, it is assumed that among indigenous peoples and in their communities, these natural spiritual practices are dormant or else are deliberately hidden from outsiders. Moreover, these beliefs are practiced to the exclusion of other historically significant religious and spiritual influences, notably Christianity.

The ideas to which Kehoe is referring to saturate the 'New Age' and environmental discourses. This view of aboriginals has also been captured in numerous portrayal of Native Americans in film, (e.g. "A Man Called Horse", "Dances With Wolves", "Grey Owl") and may be found in an astonishing array of books and other published writings. For instance, Kehoe mentions Jamake Highwater's book, *The Primal Mind*, (1981). This book became the "best selling gospel of the primitivist concept of a primordial and therefore true religion" (1990: 196) among aboriginal peoples, and was even later made into a documentary. Since that time, the New Age literature, and the New Age movement as a whole, have proliferated, further disseminating the image of the "natural Indian".

The contradictory and diverse images of the "Indian" are complex and multifaceted. What *is* clear is that these images, ideas and themes constitute a vast body of knowledge – a *discourse* – that defines and delimits the local and even personal identities of indigenous peoples. This discourse, as argued by Berkhofer above, has become a source of identity, one that may be imposed or chosen.[14] The effects of this discourse are hidden, pervasive in daily life, and often subtle, as we shall see in a later chapter. Finally, Aboriginality itself has become an instrument complicit in the bureaucratic control of the Canadian State over the lives of its indigenous populations.

In the next section, I examine the role of narrative in the formation of self and relate it to the function of discourse. In Chapter Three I demonstrate how the telling of personal narratives by residents – a vital component to Nechi House therapeutic intervention – within a romantic conception of Aboriginality, largely promoted by counsellors, is essential to the construction of an authentic "aboriginal" self.

## Narrative

> To raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself. (White 1980: 5)

My understanding of narrative and of the way that it applies to conceptions of selfhood is strongly influenced by Anthony Kerby (1991) and his interpretations of the philosophical writing of Paul Ricoeur.[15] A persistent theme in Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology is that of *reflection* or *self-reflection.*[16] Human existence, Ricoeur argues, resides in one's location

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[14] An extreme example of the latter would be is the bizarrely fictive life of Archie Belaney, otherwise known as Grey Owl, a famous 1930's environmentalist. At the turn of the century, Archie Belaney, a British national, immigrated to Canada and 'became' an Indian, learned a native language, lived in the woods, trapped, and married two Native women. Eventually, he fostered an environmental movement and toured the North American and European continents. His identity as a North American Indian was an invention crafted through the most unbelievable narratives. But he won over the public consciousness at the time; the impostor was revealed only after his death.

[15] A secondary source for my understanding of Ricoeur's philosophical writings is Henrietta Moore's article, "Paul Ricoeur: Action, Meaning, Text" in *Reading Material Culture* (1990) edited by Christopher Tilley, (Basil Blackwell) pp. 85–120.

[16] "Reflection is the appropriation of our effort to exist and of our desire to be, through the works which bear witness to that effort and desire . . . the positing or emergence of this effort or desire . . . is evidenced only by works whose meaning remains doubtful and revocable. This is where reflection calls for an interpretation and tends to move into hermeneutics. The ultimate root of our problem lies in this primitive connection between

within a 'mirror' of objects: ". . . [T]he human subject becomes 'like' a text, because its existence can only grasped through its works and signs, and as such it calls for a work of decipherment or interpretation." (Moore 1990: 87-88).

In Ricoeur's three-part volume *Time and Narrative* (1984) we see this hermeneutic thesis emerge and unfold. Ricoeur offers a detailed analysis of the relationship between narrative and temporal experience that provides a backdrop for his views on historiography and the relation between history and fiction. At the beginning of this essay he writes, "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal experience" (ibid.: 52). The articulation to which Ricoeur refers are his three stages of mimesis: mimesis one, the *prefigured*; mimesis two, the *configured*; and mimesis three, the *refigured*. Mimesis two is the "configurating operation constitutive of emplotment" and serves as a mediating device between the world of the narrative and that of the reader. This operation is supported by an earlier stage, the *prefigured* or everyday world of symbolic action – mimesis one. Mimesis two is possible only in so far that mimesis one allows for its *configuration* – that the world and the human experience of the world are made possible through meaningful symbolic actions. Emplotment serves to integrate a diverse and wide array of actors, elements, signs, and settings into a deliberate temporal sequence – to make them part of a followable story. The third stage of mimesis, *refiguration*, introduces that story back into the world of the reader. The effect of mimesis three is to *refigure* the human experience of time. No longer an abstraction, time becomes an indistinguishable feature of human experience. As Kerby writes, quoting Ricoeur:

> Narrative for Ricoeur, be it historical or fictional, involves a "search for concordance [that] is part of the unavoidable assumptions of discourse and communication" (2:28). Narration draws a figure out of the material of the everyday world of life but only, finally, in order that the story it unfolds returns back to and reconfigures that life. (1991: 43-44)

It is in this sense that narratives inform the self. That is, we tell stories about ourselves. These stories are crafted from a pool of meaningful experiences which are themselves located in

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the act of existing and the signs we deploy in our works; reflection must become interpretation because I cannot grasp the act of existing except in signs scattered in the world." (Paul Ricoeur 1970: 46 as quoted in Moore 1990: 88).

a vast and hazy temporal expanse. The experiences are selectively chosen and re-ordered. We articulate these stories to others and to ourselves. The telling – a reliving of a deliberately sequenced order of events – then folds back into the time of our lives and shapes our understanding of it. The refigured temporal expanse infiltrates human experience and passes virtually unnoticed as an experiential "fact of life." Our narratives – drawn from a collection of meaningful symbolic actions in an unbridled temporal past – reflect something about ourselves that others and we interpret. The time of our lives becomes our own through the act of containing it with the narrative device of emplotment.

## Narrative and Discourse

Our understanding of our pasts and the manner in which we construct our sense of self through language represents a creative process. We interpret the events of our life, and then situate them into frameworks of meaning. As Ricoeur wrote, "we belong to history before telling stories or writing history. The game of telling is included in the reality told" (Ricoeur 1981: 294). In other words, our recollections of events in our past are the product of interpretation influenced by the present historical and social context. Our recollections are simply never neutral and pure memories. In a discussion of psychoanalysis Connerton reminds us of this same issue. He writes,

> To remember, then, is precisely not to recall events as isolated; it is to become capable of forming meaningful narrative sequences. In the name of a particular narrative commitment, an attempt is being made to integrate isolated or alien phenomena into a single unified process. (1989: 26)

Connerton is referring to the discursive characteristics of psychoanalysis – a perspective similar to that of Shafer (1984) discussed earlier. In other words, psychoanalysis is a discourse that shapes the analysand's narrative and hence can be seen to convince the client to accept a jointly crafted interpretation of the events of his or her life. Critical to this perspective on discourse and narrative are the operations and relations of power which make the person a subject to the discourse. Psychoanalysis as a discourse, then, is part of regime of truth – a Freudian science – which generates and represses, defines and delimits the identity of its

subjects. Similarly, Gerhardt and Stinson (1996) also question the widely held perception among therapists that the therapeutic environment is a neutral context where the analyst "adopts the role of a mirror and merely reflects back the client's own conflicts expressed in the form of transference" (ibid.: 450). Instead, they suggest, the self-surveillance on the part of a client is a kind "analytic subjectivity" inscribed through his or her subscribing to a dialogic encounter. The profession of psychotherapy holds certain assumptions about its practice which act as "demand characteristics" and calls upon the client to agree to and meet these demands in order to benefit from the intervention.[17] In response to these demand characteristics, they argue, a client sets up discourse markers i.e. "*I don't know*" and "*I mean*", in order to reconcile with them.

My own discussion of the narratives of Nechi House residents and the influence of the House's discursive practices rests on the above theoretical issues. I argue here that the meanings which a resident draws from a set of prefigured experiences, configured and refigured within a specific discursive environment, and which become the basis to a narrated self, are shaped by the space where this has occurred. The space of the House encompasses and condenses an economy of imbricated discursive practices. Particularly, the issue of the House's ambivalent spatial status as either therapeutic community or authoritarian institution, as autonomous from the correctional system or an extension of it, is an issue throughout this dissertation. In sum, this spatial ambivalence is a reflection of its wavering discursive practices – to heal or to punish – that periodically changes the meanings of its spaces. In this sense, then, and through the eyes of residents, the space of the House represents a readable text that refers to the world beyond it.

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[17] Gerhardt and Stinson outline four 'demand characteristics'. The first of these is that it is better to know than not know. "... [T]he crucial feature of the psychoanalytic approach is the belief in the primacy of knowledge as a means of relieving psychic distress. (1996: 453). Secondly, it is important to observe and reflect on oneself. Therapists divide the self as a subject (experiencing) and object (observing). Third, some forms of action and expression are suspected as referring to some underlying and primary meaning. In other words, there is more than meets the eye. Finally, in psychoanalysis it is mandatory that we understand the personal motivation and significance in understanding our problematic behaviour.

I will now present a set of ideas which effectively demonstrate a means to interpret space as text. This majority of these ideas have been borrowed from Henrietta Moore's study of the Marakwet of Kenya.

## Space

As a theoretical issue in the social sciences, space has long been ignored or treated simply as the material environment wherein social interaction unfolds. While, it may seem, as Giddens puts it, rather "banal and uninstructive to assert . . . that social activity occurs in time and space" (1979: 202), Foucault was deeply aware of the use of space and time in the exercise of power relations. Foucault makes this issue clear in "Space, Knowledge and Power" (1984) where he comments on the changing role of spatial configurations in human affairs, particularly the political uses of the built environment as forms of social control (see for example, Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 1979).[18]

Unfortunately, Foucault's concept of space has a literalness to it that does not fully capture the impact of spatiality on social interaction. Until recently, space has remained a marginal interest to social theory. One possible explanation for this lack of analysis is an uncertainty as to how to approach the topic. However, looking at space purely in terms of the material elements that constitute it may not be so productive. That is, the physical environment does not speak for itself. I am suggesting that more useful approach would be to consider space in terms of its symbolic meanings and the social practices that generate and interact with these meanings. Space should be considered the medium and product of social interaction and human agency (Pred 1990: 10). Precisely, the interaction between the spatial order and the agent should be viewed as a kind of dialogue that ultimately reproduces the social order. A work that I feel reflects this kind of analysis very well and which applies to my own interest in the spatiality of Nechi House is Henrietta Moore's, *Space, Text and Gender: An*

[18] For example, Foucault comments on the modernist belief that increased travel permitted by the construction of railroads would lead to greater familiarity among European peoples. In fact, German military planners were more correct in understanding that railroads would serve the purposes of conflicts more efficiently.

*Anthropological Study of the Marakwet of Kenya* (1996). In this work, Moore argues that the organization of space reinforces the ideology of gender relations, demonstrating how the relation between the ideological system and the ordering of a village space perpetuates "the invisibility of women" in the official social order.

**Moore & Marakwet Space**

Moore's study of the lives of Marakwet tribes women of the Cherangani hills along the Kerio valley of Kenya is rich in ethnographic detail and theoretically complex. Here I will only touch on her theoretical approach of looking at space as a form of readable text that social actors engage with and interpret through their repeated actions. Her theoretical argument is strongly relevant to my own fieldwork observations of the symbolic actions of residents and staff at Nechi House.

The name Marakwet is a recent invention, prompted by colonial contact. Presently, the term refers to five populated sections or tribal villages in this region in Kenya. The people of this region tend to live at high altitudes on sloping precipices. Cattle and small scale agriculture are the primary means of subsistence. Within the last two decades increased influences of "Westernization" – primarily a wage-earning system as well the importation of western goods and new housing styles – have steadily influenced a change in social relationships.

Moore's primary research interest is to understand the different experiences of men and women in male dominated Marakwet culture. Moore argues, generally speaking, that women in this cultural group are rendered invisible within the official social order. She argues that a fruitful course of analysis in understanding the different experiences of culture is to look at the way men and women interact within and understand the spatial order. One of her principal contentions in her book is that "[t]he biography of every individual woman contains a number of temporal stages which are formed and defined by spatial movements (ibid.: 79). Men and women interact with the spatial domain of the village very differently; consequently, they draw significantly different meanings from the metaphorical elements of the spatial order. A dialectic

relationship emerges between the elements of the spatial order, people's daily practices within it and the creation and the reinforcement of the meanings of space. Spatiality, then, plays a fundamental role in the perpetuation of an ideology of gender relations and roles within village life.

In order to provide an analysis of the impact of spatiality on the lives of Marakwet women, Moore constructs a theoretical argument that conceives space as a kind of readable text. In making this argument she weaves together the role of metaphor in daily life, Bourdieu's ideas on the meanings of space as related to practice, and Ricoeur's notions of the text and theories of readings.

**Metaphor, Practice and Text**

Studies in linguistics and related fields of social theory argue that metaphor and metaphorical systems serve a critical role in shaping our conception of the world (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). One of the reasons for the importance of metaphor is the linguistic tension it creates in its deployment in language: it is a semantic innovation that operates at the level of sentence (Moore 1990: 92). Metaphor requires an act of decipherment or interpretation in order for its strategic meaning to be understood; metaphor therefore has a polysemic character. Furthermore, metaphor is decipherable only within a system of meaning and, thus, is context dependent and linked to social practices. In discussing the role of metaphor, Moore introduces the reader to Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977). Through his work on spatiality in Kabyle cosmology and the Berber world, Bourdieu shows that the meaning of space can be invoked only through practice. In other words, the spatial order and the conceptual scheme are intrinsically linked and interdependent. Thus, Bourdieu's ideas of space, Moore argues, rest on understanding how a conceptual scheme (for example, an ideology of gender relations) informs the spatial order and the generative function this relationship plays in reproducing the social order. These conceptual schemes inform the organization of space as

well as social action; physical movement through space has a mnemonic function. Spatial orders thus have no permanent meanings; rather, meanings must be invoked:

> In all this, Bourdieu insists that the spatial order can have no fixed meaning which exists outside social practices. It is true that the actions of individual actors are informed by the conceptual schemes which organize space, but the actual meaning given to the spatial order is in turn dependent upon the meanings invoked through the actions of individuals. Thus, social practices are influenced by the relational positioning of individual elements in the spatial order, but the actual interpretation given to the ordering of those elements during any action or series of actions is dependent upon the nature of the action concerned and the conscious and unconscious intentions of the individual. (1996: 84)

Moore's linking of metaphor to theories of practice demonstrates that meaning is context dependent; metaphorical meanings must be invoked through social practices within the spatial order. It follows from her presentation of the polysemic character of metaphor, and the invocation of meaning through practice, that the actual and total structure of any social space is complex and multileveled. For the Marakwet, the individual household (the woman's domain), the fields and village as a whole (the men's domain), and a social actor's temporal movements through and repeated actions within these spaces construct the spatial order as a kind of text that is open to be "read" by peoples' subjective experiences in that space.[19]

The idea that space may be conceived as a kind of text has several implications. A text is a written work of discourse and may be analysed in terms of its internal structure and as a system of rules (*langue*) or in terms of an act or an event of speech (*parole*), what it says. That a spatial text has a reference as well as a sense is a significant insight.[20] Moore writes,

> This referential capacity is crucial to the analysis of space as a text because it implies that, as structured totality or "work," a text cannot be reduced profitably to its constituent elements. This is in direct contradiction to structuralist analyses of space which seek to discover meaning by reducing the organization of space to its constituent elements or underlying structure. The irreducibility of the text applies to texts of all kinds. (Moore 1996: 87)

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[19] Moore's extension of the anthropological model of culture as text to the area of spatiality is strongly influenced by Clifford Geertz, whose interpretive anthropology views human behaviour as a cultural 'script' being played out by social actors. Moore points out, however, that Geertz was not alone in this textual approach to explaining human behaviour; specifically, Paul Ricoeur developed similar ideas.

[20] "To refer is what the sentence does in a certain situation and according to a certain use. It is also what the speaker does when he applies his words to reality. That someone refers to something at a certain time is an event, a speech event. But this event receives its structure from the meaning as sense. The speaker refers to something on the basis of, or through, the ideal structure of the sense. The sense, so to speak, is traversed by the referring intention of the speaker. In this way the dialectic of event and meaning receives a new development from the dialectic of sense and reference." (Ricoeur 1976: 20 as quoted in Valdes 1991: 5)

A text cannot be reduced to individual sentences. Rather, these sentences are part of a larger work that must be interpreted as a whole. Further, because it is written, a text becomes distanced from its author and, potentially, from its intended audience, which greatly increases its referential capabilities. This distancing of the text from its author and original audience is known as *distanciation*: "what is inscribed in the organization of space is not the actuality of past actions, but their meaning"(Moore 1996: 88). In other words, the meaning surpasses the event. Next, the spatial text is "removed from its historical and social conditions" (ibid.). That is, what is being signified in a spatial text does not necessarily correspond to the original intentions of authors / actors; nor is the signification exclusive to its original audience. Finally, the spatial text is freed from ostensive reference and therefore is not tied to the context of a single action or set of actions (ibid.).

In applying her argument, Moore discusses the role of ash in a Sibou[21] village. Ash, along with animal dung and chaff, are associated by the local people with refuse. Each form of refuse is designated a specific spatial location within the village and is never mixed with others. One possible reason for this, Moore argues, is that refuse is associated with death and corpses are buried in different locations within the village in accordance to their age, gender, and marital status (ibid: 110). Ash is always disposed of behind the house from where it originated; this disposal of ash is associated with women's domestic work. But ash has more extensive symbolic meanings to men and women. For men, ash implies sterility – representing eternal death to one's lineage; it is destructive to their interests and their power. But for women, ash has a more productive meaning – that of female sexuality and domestic responsibility.

In the circumcision ceremony of a woman she is smeared with ash, connotative of change in her social status. Further, when a young girl refuses an arranged marriage, she may cover herself with ash as a way signifying a sterile relationship between herself and the proposed partner. But the metaphorical meanings of ash and its strategic uses must be learned. These meanings are acquired through learning socialization and everyday practice. This

[21] The Sibou are a sub-group within the larger Marakwet grouping.

conceptual scheme designates the role of ash in daily life, its spatial location in the village and its association to a symbolic order of meaning. Through socialization, social actors learn the meaning of ash, an understanding that is in turn reinforced through people's "customary" actions within the space of the village; the specific metaphorical meanings of ash are invoked through social practice. Ash and ash as metaphor consolidate the ideology of gender relations: one's knowledge of it is mastered through practice and locates its spatial designation within the text of the village; its referential qualities serve to naturalize gender relations in village life.

Applying Moore's insights to my own analysis of Nechi House, I perceive the House's space as text – a symbolically structured totality or a work of discourse. The actions or social practices of residents and staff within this text invoke metaphorical meanings that affect and reflect the ambivalent conceptual schemes which underlie its existence and raison d'être, to heal or to discipline. Interpretations of the text of the House are never stable or consistent, but rather are in constant flux. Residents and staff must negotiate their conflicting interpretations. When the counselling staff succeed in imposing their interpretation on residents, the discourse of healing takes hold. A resident who accepts the interpretation will narrate an identity through the discursive statements of an "essential", romantic aboriginal identity in an attempt to cultivate a sense of renewal and recovery. But sometimes this process of negotiation does not succeed and a resident resists the discourse.

The following chapters – Three and Four – discuss the relation between discourse, narrative and space. These chapters present this process through the words of the residents and staff. The upcoming section – Chapter Two – provides details related to the House: the incarceration of aboriginal offenders, the House's relationship to and role within corrections, its therapeutic ideology and practices, and its vacillation between healing and punitive, ideological and practical poles.

# Chapter Two
## Nechi House

### Nechi House and the Correctional System

Nechi House essentially operates on a contractual basis with the federal and provincial correctional systems.[22] The Canadian and Quebec judicial systems allot the House a specified number of days to board, feed, and provide therapeutic services for inmates in the custody of these correctional agencies. Through this arrangement, the House receives inmates from the federal and provincial systems and receives a per diem payment for each day a client uses the services of the House. The per diem covers everything from rent, food, and allowances to therapeutic services and any other expenses the House may incur boarding and counselling a resident. Providing contractual services for the federal and provincial correctional systems is the House's lifeblood.

From the point of view of the federal and provincial correctional systems, this form of "contracting out" to an external institution has multiple benefits. For one, it is very cost effective. Keeping an inmate in prison is considerably more expensive than transferring him to the custody of a halfway house. As well, keeping an inmate in prison who poses no real risk to society makes little sense. Further, providing a supportive therapeutic environment to an inmate with a history of alcohol, drug and substance abuse problems is a more humane approach to rehabilitation than continued imprisonment. Finally, it could be suggested that the fact that there is currently a disproportionately high number of males of aboriginal ancestry in the correctional system means that moving them out of federal and provincial institutions, and therefore be seen to reduce the official "numeric or statistical" population of incarcerated aboriginal males, undoubtedly has some political benefits.

[22] This information is taken from my work experience while employed in the House's administrative office.

**The Incarcerated Aboriginal**

That men of aboriginal ancestry are over-represented in Canada's criminal justice system has been a known and statistically proven fact for at least a decade. Although the national population of aboriginal peoples is approximately three percent, as of March 31, 1997, "they accounted for 12% of all offenders under federal jurisdiction" (Solicitor General, Canada 1996: 4). The numbers of offenders of aboriginal ancestry in the incarcerated population of federal institutions varies considerably across the country. The disproportionate numbers of aboriginal offenders is highest in federal and provincial institutions across the Prairie Provinces: Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. In Manitoba, for example, the representation of offenders of aboriginal ancestry in federal and provincial institutions combined is fifty-six percent. In Alberta, the combined total is thirty-one percent, even though the total aboriginal population in the entire province is only four to five percent. Not surprisingly, Saskatchewan shows a similar disproportion. Quebec is the only province that does not seem to have such an over representation of incarcerated men of aboriginal ancestry. Correctional Services data from 1987 for federal inmates in Quebec institutions indicate that less than one percent of the incarcerated population identified themselves as aboriginal.[23]

**Final Report: Task Force on Aboriginal Peoples in Federal Corrections**

The problem of the predominance of aboriginal offenders in Canadian prisons was observed as early as the 1970s. Since the late 1980s, the Solicitor General's office as well as several provincial judicial enquiries have studied the relationship of aboriginal peoples and their communities to the judicial systems (see for example Canada, Solicitor General, Ministry Secretariat 1988a and 1988b). There has been a coordinated and ongoing effort within Correctional Services of Canada, mandated by the Solicitor General's Office of Canada, to proactively address the over-representation of peoples of aboriginal ancestry in the correctional

[23] This statistical data is taken from James Waldram's book on aboriginal symbolic healing, *The Way of the Pipe* (1997: 21– 23). The source of his data is Correctional Services of Canada, which closely monitors its incarcerated populations.

system (Canada, Solicitor General, Ministry Secretariat 1996). In March, 1987 the Solicitor General of Canada established a Task Force to investigate the over-representation of offenders of aboriginal ancestry in federal correctional institutions.

In the Report's introduction and at points in its text, the Task Force acknowledges the cultural and social diversity of aboriginal peoples. However, while acknowledging this diversity, nowhere in the Report is this cultural and social diversity elaborated upon. Rather, many sections of the final report even underline the image of a homogenous aboriginal identity.

The only point where the report's authors offer a more specific definition of the term 'aboriginal' is in the introduction. This definition is found in a quote from the Task Force's mandate which outlines their objectives. It reads, "Examine the process which Aboriginal offenders (status and non-status Indians, Metis, and Inuit) . . ."(ibid. 5).

The terms "status" and "non-status" Indian designate aboriginal peoples who do or do not fall under the definition of "an Indian within the meaning of the Indian Act, chapter 27, Statutes of Canada,"[24] The Indian Act , arguably, protects the legal distinctiveness of some aboriginal peoples and their communities within the Canadian State. No broader explanation or historical presentation of what constitutes being or not being an "Indian" is offered; it is simply expressed as a self-evident fact. The terms "Inuit" and "Metis" have a more geographical and historical basis to their specific usage. Inuit peoples are defined by cultural, historical, linguistic and geographic differences. On the other hand, Metis peoples are aboriginal and European "hybrids" from the furtrade era in Canada. But even these two terms are never fully discussed in the context of the Final Report. The definition of aboriginal in the Report's introduction is simply a bureaucratic designation, and does not elaborate upon the actual cultural and social diversity of the peoples it denotes.

The Report's second chapter provides an overview of four contexts relating to the uniqueness of aboriginal offenders. The authors discuss the "legal", "socio-economic",

[24] This is the exact wording on a card of certificate of Indian Status. What defines a "status" Indian is merely a registry of names. The point here is that the bureaucratic category is not well defined and, in practice, not based on any clearly defined cultural, historical, and social constructs.

"health", and "spiritual" attributes of aboriginal offenders. The legal context refers to the place of aboriginal peoples within the Canadian constitution and the protection of aboriginal rights, thereby reinforcing the term aboriginal as a largely bureaucratic label. The Report's addressing of socio-economic factors discusses the incidence of crime in relation to the general levels of impoverishment of many Native communities. Yet this section does not provide any detail on the historical factors which gave rise to these conditions such as the experience of colonialism and past government policy.

The last two sections, the health and spiritual contexts, go the furthest in presenting a homogenous aboriginal identity. For example, in regards to health, the report reads,

> The traditional Indian view of health, which is still maintained to this day, is that the term "health" means a state of complete physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being. This concept is more encompassing and holistic than the European-Canadian model of health that focuses on disease and infirmity. (ibid: 12)

The Report constructs Aboriginality in opposition to a colonizing "Other" (European-Canadians) and the hegemony of the Canadian State – including its healthcare system. As well, the Report presents a concept of health as distinctively "Indian" without any reference to the autonomous cultural practices among aboriginal peoples. In other words, local medical knowledge and health practices are subsumed under a blanket definition of a traditional "Indian" view of health. This assertion serves to obscure the diverse and specific cultural meanings of "health" and well-being among aboriginal populations.

The Report's discussion of spirituality, however, goes much further in constructing the image of an inclusive aboriginal identity. Here the authors present ideas of the "Sacred Circle" "the Creator", the cultural significance of the number four and the "four colours" of humanity. Once again the diversity of aboriginal peoples is acknowledged but never discussed:

> While significant differences exist among cultural and spiritual practices of Aboriginal nations, such as those between Indian and Inuit peoples, the importance attached to the teachings of the Circle is evident in many Aboriginal societies and in most, if not all, Sisterhoods and Brotherhoods. Many call it the Sacred Circle because of the deep and abiding lessons intrinsic to it.
> The Sacred Circle represents a cycle with no beginning or end. Because of its symmetry, the Sacred Circle represents balance and harmony that is the ideal state for human life and the world.

> The Creator gives people constant reminders of the Circle's importance. The sun, moon, and stars are circle. Many other creations, such as trees and medicine plants are also round. (ibid: 13)

The Report separates Inuit and Indians without being fully explicit about what constitutes those cultural and spiritual distinctions. But southern aboriginal groups – "Indians" - are presented as practicing a pan-Amerindian form of belief linked to the Sacred Circle. No reference is made to the major historic and present-day religious influences among Native peoples, for example, the introduction of Christianity during colonial times, or the present-day spread of Evangelical Pentecostalism in many Native communities. The authors of the Report relate that the Sacred Circle carries lessons, and seems capable of communicating these lessons as they are intrinsic to it.

Finally, there is a surprising degree of proselytizing in areas of the Report. The remainder of the section on spirituality discusses other aspects of a pan-Amerindian spirituality, such as the supposed numerology of the number four among many Aboriginal nations, and the four sacred colours, red, black, white, and yellow, which are said to refer to the four races of the world. In their conclusion, the authors write,

> To maintain the Creator's design of balance and harmony within the Creation, each people must recognize their own place in the Circle and recognize that, while different, they must treat each other equally. If one people were to try to become the same as the another, the result would be imbalance and disharmony. Disservice is done to the Creator if the differences of the four peoples are not recognized and honoured. The Sacred Circle would lose its harmony if the four peoples are not treated equally. Because of many Aboriginal peoples' deep roots to their own culture, the delivery of service to those individuals must take their spiritual and cultural background into account, including such values as art, language, family and community. Aboriginal-specific programs and services are thus warranted whenever they are required to ensure the same opportunity and equality of results. (ibid.: 14).

The authors thus level the array of specific cultural identities and spiritual practices of aboriginal peoples through supposing the existence of a coherent pan-Amerindian spirituality. They then use this religious ideology to advocate (to the point of proselytizing) for the delivery of culturally sensitive programs and services.[25]

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[25] Later sections of the Final Report provide more specific details on some of these programs and services, such as the allowing Elders to move freely within the prison and designating them with the same bureaucratic status as a religious chaplain or allowing Native inmates to practice sweatlodges and informing correctional staff on the protocol of searching medicine bundles.

As a whole, the task force attempts to provide a set of inclusive and wide "proactive" measures designed to address the needs of aboriginal offenders who are in the judicial system. The Final Report homogenizes the cultural and social diversity of aboriginal peoples as a way of addressing this mandate. In the Report's second chapter, as I have pointed out, Aboriginality is constructed as a religious ideology representing a powerful and ominous ancestral spiritual voice which seeks recognition by the Canadian State. This pan-Amerindian religious ideology is linked to an urgent need to re-instate harmony within an essentialized and racial world order. The application of aboriginal as a generic form of identity serves to strengthen the discourse of Aboriginality, thereby consolidating the belief in cultural primitivism – i.e. that aboriginal peoples through their organic philosophical and spiritual teachings could heal the troubled world.[26]

What is clear from this Report is that "aboriginal" has at least two meanings. On the one hand, it is an ethnic category with profound legal implications which impact upon the bureaucratic systems of the state. On the other hand, the report's authors construct "aboriginal" to imply a homogenous cultural identity and indomitable spiritual force in the world. The report's authors have intertwined these meanings in order to address the over-representation of aboriginal people in the Canadian justice system. This issue then takes on a moral, political, and spiritual urgency.

The above is the political and social context in which Nechi House emerged. First of all, the Canadian State generally does not fully distinguish in its bureaucratic practices among the wide spectrum of cultural and social identities of its indigenous populations. When it does, it is on specific geographic, historical or legal bases, such as, Inuit and Metis populations, or "status" versus "non-status" Indians. Consequently, in its day to day relationship with the

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[26] The fact that this report was written in the 1980's suggests that its authors could have been influenced by the New Age literature being written at that time by a number of best selling authors, such as Jamake Highwater, Joseph Campbell, Carlos Castenada, and others. Joseph Niehardt's (1961) *Black Elk Speaks* was also a popular source of this primal wisdom discourse during the 1970's counter-culture movement. Although to my knowledge no official documentation has been collected, another source of influence could have been the Native run treatment centres that had begun to proliferate in the 1980's. These organic influences, however, could have been reading or been influenced by the same discourse. The source and spread of these ideas would make a very interesting study.

Canadian justice system, the House is forced to accept men whose backgrounds encompass considerable cultural, historic, geographic, legal, linguistic, political and socio-economic diversity. Secondly, there exists a pervasive and powerful notion among many European Canadians (and among many aboriginal peoples as well) that all aboriginal peoples share some sort of essential commonality to each other, often in terms of their religious systems and spirituality. Given that these are the conditions upon which the House operates, it is not surprising that the counselling staff would develop and use a therapeutic ideology and set of practices which further homogenize the diverse cultural identities of its aboriginal residents. Clearly, Aboriginality as a discursive practice of the Canadian State has, to a large extent, already done this for them. Going back even further, these discursive practices are historically rooted in the colonial encounters with the indigenous Other. Thus, Nechi House is merely acting within a pre-established discursive framework that is inseparable from its bureaucratic state context.

**Therapeutic Ideology and Practices**

Based upon knowledge gained from discussions and interviews with residents and Nechi House staff, as well as my fieldwork observations, the House's therapeutic ideology and practices represent a syncretic and eclectic approach to psychotherapeutic interventions or healing. All of the counsellors at the House are, to varying degrees, familiar with or trained in Western psychotherapeutic methods, that is, counselling education, psychology, or social work. The time frame of the therapy is about eighteen to twenty weeks. Much of the therapy revolves around "talking cure" forms of interventions: intensive group and individual counselling sessions, psycho-educational programs, meditation groups, and other conventional forms of western psychotherapy. These therapeutic group sessions are held at Nechi House throughout the week, often in the morning. The various programs and counselling sessions normally occupy a large portion of residents' time during their stay at the House. All residents who have not fully completed the House's therapeutic program are required to attend.

Methods closely akin to a "symbolic healing"[27] approach are often utilized by the House counsellors. The corresponding therapeutic dialogues draw heavily on a generic pan-Amerindian religious and spiritual rhetoric. In turn this rhetoric seems to be strongly influenced by, and borrows from, cultural imagery from Great Plains, Eastern Woodlands and even Northwest Coast native cultures. Some of the ceremonies and rituals include the use of smudging[28] 'medicines'[29] , sweatlodge ceremonies[30] and a variety of other rituals.

However, in order to provide many of the symbolic healing ceremonies, the House must, in a sense, 'contract out' to cultural and spiritual leaders from Native communities across Eastern Canada and even the United States. For the most part, the counselling staff is not able to provide or lead some of the more complex ceremonies, such as sweatlodges since they have not been trained to do so. However, the House keeps a list of Elders[31] who are willing to work with the House and who provide some of these ceremonial services. These Elders may also provide counselling to a resident if he should request it. During my fieldwork, however, I never encountered any Elders working with the House.[32] The only time I saw House staff conduct a "native ritual" themselves was at an "intensive therapy camp" which I took part in (discussed

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[27] For discussions on aspects of symbolic healing, see Dow (1986a) and (1986b). Dow argues that symbolic healing has 'universal aspects'. Culturally specific symbols have generalizing effects on social experience and are intrinsic to a culture's model of reality.

[28] Smudging refers to the practice of burning or smoldering 'the medicine' and wafting the smoke over one's body. It is a form of ritual and spiritual cleansing.

[29] "Medicines" include sweetgrass, sage, tobacco, and other herbal / incense plants.

[30] The sweatlodge ceremony is an intensely hot steam bath often made from bent and interwoven willow stalks covered with canvas or leather tarps. Large rocks heated till red-hot are used to generate steam. Sweatlodge ceremonies among Plains and Woodlands cultural groups are used for medicinal healing, instruction and ritual cleansing. For discussions on their present day esoteric meaning among some Plains Indian groups, i.e. Saulteaux, see Waldram (1997: 85 – 90) and their use in medicinal healing and ritual cleansing see Morse, Young, & Swartz (1991) and Wilbush (1988).

[31] The term Elder generally refers to the aged population in Native communities who through their life experiences may be regarded as community advisors. In my view, Elder is a social construction that is tied to the cultural politics of community life. Although there indeed is a factual basis to the assertion that elderly persons or "Elders" were and are esteemed members in the community, the term has developed a wider application in recent years; Elder status, from my experience and knowledge, has been elaborated and in practice is applied unevenly in Native communities and organizations. For example, during the course of my employment and fieldwork at the House I watched certain individuals gain and then lose their status as Elders. Further, one time I read a list of bad and phony Native Elders in North America that was being circulated on the Internet! Unfortunately, I cannot recall the source of this list.

[32] During my working experience with the House I did have the opportunity to meet a few Elders. On one occasion I helped to facilitate a sweat lodge ceremony for a group of residents who requested it from a local man who works with incarcerated aboriginal men. He was paid through gifts from the residents, not by the House directly.

in more detail in Chapter Three). The counsellors informed me that this ritual was a Cree Indian "Mourning ceremony". They reported to me they learned about it either at a conference, in a book or from someone who worked with the House at one time. The counsellors conducted this ceremony without 'expert' help. The ceremony had a very powerful cathartic effect on the young resident who was subjected to it.

As I have demonstrated, pan-Amerindian ceremonies and rituals, such as smudging, sweatlodges, or the ceremony mentioned above, form an essential part of the counselling rhetoric and therapeutic practices. Based upon what I observed and learned through the actions and words of counsellors, most seemed to share a deep and sincere personal commitment to the spiritual teachings that they were themselves in the process of learning and which in turn they were passing on to residents. The most common venue for this transference of spiritual teachings was the Nechi Community Circle.

**The Nechi Community Circle**

A large portion of my fieldwork experience at the Nechi House involved participating in group psychotherapy sessions. Group psychotherapy, often referred to simply as "group" or "the Circle", and was held three times a week in the morning. These sessions at the House were also consistently referred to as NCC: the Nechi Community Circle. Frequently, during NCC men would share their day to day conflicts and troubles at the House. Often, these sessions served as opportunities to gripe about life at the House. Nechi House's counsellors, many of whom are veterans of NCC and were well trained in counselling methods, used these gripe sessions to formulate for themselves the conflicts and troubles of the men. The purpose of this formulation was to locate the residents' interactions within a larger framework of behavioral, psychological and sub-conscious meanings. On other occasions, when an individual resident was ready and willing, his counsellor would facilitate his discussing a traumatic event from his personal history to the "group". In these cases or in cases where counsellors succeeded in their attempts to formulate the immediate conflicts among residents into a larger

order of meaning, the impact on some residents could be emotionally staggering. During these particular group sessions, some residents would spontaneously disclose hidden and suppressed traumatic memories of abuse, death, pain, or violence. These disclosures were often accompanied with cathartic release and sometimes extreme episodes of depression or rage. Though the incessant griping of some residents[33] during NCC could be tiresome, many sessions were intensely compelling and dramatic. For me, NCC was an awakening to some of the worst and most disturbing tales of personal misery and suffering I had ever encountered.

**The Rhetoric of Community and Circle**

The Nechi Community Circle is orchestrated by two rhetorical devices that are central to the House's therapeutic ideology: "community" and "circle". According to the counselling staff, the House is conceived of as a therapeutic community. "Community" refers simultaneously to the general life and well being of the House, and to group psychotherapy. In other words, within group psychotherapy and beyond it, the community implies 'healthy' forms of behaviour of and interaction among residents, staff, and visitors.[34] This therapeutic community surrounds a central "Sacred Fire" where "the Medicines" are kept and burned – a metaphorical hearth where the spiritual energy of the community resides and from which it emanates. The Circle does not literally surround a burning fire at the House.[35] Rather, the "Sacred Fire" shares a metaphorical likeness to a tabernacle in a Catholic Church where the Chalice, Wine and Communion bread is kept; in other words, both are protective receptacles for the implements of and means to spiritual communion. Membership in the therapeutic community is divided between permanent and temporary members. Staff members are permanent members of the community while the residents are considered temporary members. Membership in the community rests upon one's level of commitment to a set of "traditional"

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[33] These residents were often the targets of derisive comments from fellow residents. One resident, in particular, irritated some group members whom then referred to NCC as "Nathan's Complaining Circle."

[34] For example, refraining from the use of alcohol, drugs and substances, a persistent concern in the House. Drug trafficking is also a serious issue.

[35] At the intensive therapeutic camp, the Sacred Fire was a literal fire where "the Medicines" were burned. The Sacred Fire symbolizes a place to gather, share, and be soothed by light and warmth.

and "aboriginal" community values: sharing, caring, respect and honesty. One non-aboriginal counsellor described the community and its values in the following way:

> You can argue on and on what "traditional" means. I know this question is of interest to you. I have no set-in-stone idea of what is traditional and what is not traditional. For me, it's those four precepts: sharing, caring, respect, and honesty - are regarded as shared values amongst aboriginal communities and they are not controversial in anyway. So that's all I can say about that. Well, I will hang my hat on that as being traditional. I know historically enough about aboriginal history to know that traditionally everybody lived with those precepts. Is it traditional or not? But anyway that's what we go for. Is that applicable today in modern society? Yes it is. And what kind of ceremonies can we develop around that helps to structure that helps to guide the path. [BL 06/23/98]

The counsellors must construct a surrogate aboriginal community for their residents, most of who are from or strongly affiliated with a specific and rural aboriginal community. The counsellors must operate with reference to a broad "ethnic" category, one that has been dictated by the state through the correctional systems, and which homogenizes the cultural and social diversity of a segment of the incarcerated population.

The Circle has both literal and metaphorical applications; thematically, it supports and widens the therapeutic concept of "community". The Circle is a metaphor for a set of concentric social experiences and relationships. Primarily, it refers to a pan-Amerindian conception of a 'holistic' self as a 'medicine wheel.'[36] The medicine wheel, from my understanding, constructs the self as a balance of emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual components. The Circle or medicine wheel also refers to a set of intertwined social relationships: self, family, community, and (indigenous) nation , as well as the natural, physical, mental and spiritual worlds. In short, the Circle implies a sense of moral integrity and personal strength. A male counsellor described the circle in the following way,

> There's a symbolic level to it [healing] which helps you to bring together a community; certainly a circle does. Ceremonies and symbols, I think - I don't know any other way to bring people together than to have shared symbols and ceremonies. That, I think, has always been the way across all cultures. And a symbol is kind of an inanimate thing that tells you a

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[36] The medicine wheel is a popular concept that can be found in pan-Amerindian and New Age literature and rhetoric. Historical ethnographic information on 'medicine wheels' is virtually non-existent. Medicine wheels also popularly refer to large, generally circular, arrangements of stone boulders. Archaeological and ethnographic data on these stone monuments is equally sparse, though among some plains cultural groups these monuments were culturally significant (Kehoe and Kehoe 1979). Lately, however, this significance and the 'spiritual power' of these medicine wheels has been increasing, probably due to a growth in a discourse of 'Native spirituality.' For discussions on the application of medicine wheels in therapy see Brink 1989, Huber 1993.

> whole story right away. You don't need words you just know. The symbol hits you in a holistic way; it can be very powerful. While a ceremony is the activity that puts the life into the symbol and brings the symbol to life - alive. And certainly the circle is a symbol of community: egalitarian, communication. The circle very much - the medicines are certainly the symbolic meaning also. [CC 06/19/98]

The Circle acts as a metaphor for the group; it is a way of bringing and holding people together in a community. It is also a metaphor for honesty, integrity, respect, sharing and trust. The metaphor serves to reinforce the rhetoric of community. All ceremonies and medicines practiced within the group invariably refer to the keeping the Circle together and believing in its power to heal. Since the residents are male, the Circle implies a kind of brotherhood or male solidarity. Cultivating a positive male image is also an aspect integral to the task of healing. In literal terms, however, the Circle means the Nechi Community Circle (NCC) or group psychotherapy, and stands for the physical space of the House as representative of a therapeutic community. Finally, the Circle refers to a North American aboriginal social movement directed at community and personal healing (see for example, Adelson 1992, Brady 1995, Degnen 1996). Nechi House should be considered as an instantiation of and, importantly, a spatial location for this movement. 'Circle healing' also takes place outside the House at affiliated community organizations, for example, the local Montreal Native Friendship Centre, a community organization for urban Native people. Some House residents and staff attend these gatherings in addition to their therapy at the House.

During group psychotherapy sessions, the community members form a literal and metaphorical 'Circle' that surrounds "the Medicines", (i.e. sage, sweetgrass, tobacco, etc.), and the Sacred Fire. The Medicines are kept within the Circle. At the beginning and sometimes at the end of "group" the Medicines are burned for "smudging". To borrow from the rhetoric of the House, one's membership to the Nechi Community is dependent on one's belief and commitment to the Circle and the Medicines. A community member demonstrates his belief and commitment through practicing the values of sharing, caring, honesty and respect towards himself and his fellow community members.

In his study of symbolic healing practices among Native inmates in a Saskatchewan penitentiary, Waldram (1997) discusses the use of rhetoric in healing. Referring to Csordas' (1983) study of Catholic Pentecostal healing, Waldram argues that the religious community is essential to the process of transformation. He writes,

> Through the use of symbols, the interchange of language and other forms of communication between healer and patient are essential, leading to a transformation in the patient's understanding of the problem. Such a conception presupposes that the language and symbols used are meaningful for both the healer and the patient. The religious community plays a crucial role in this interchange. Both the definitions of the problem and the cure "conform to the agenda of the religious community," and "healing is understood to occur in terms of integration of the healed person into the religious community. (ibid: 72)

Based on what I observed within NCC and the staff's reliance upon symbolic healing approaches, the rhetoric of healing, the integration of the sufferer within a therapeutic community, and the transformation of one's problems from a source of despair and suffering to a source of revitalization and strength were strongly evident within the House. For many residents who desire to transform their negative experiences in life and the pain and sadness that goes with these experiences, the House's rhetoric of community and its language of healing do have positive effects while they are in the "care" (as opposed to the custody) of the House.

## Essentialized Aboriginal Identity and NCC

Counsellors at Nechi House do tend to essentialize the aboriginal identity of the residents. Symbols of Aboriginality are linked to an identity seen as both inherent and latent. Some counselling staff assume that residents will intuitively recognize and see the meaning embodied by these symbols. According to one staff member, for example:

> But [the symbols] also have a - I think - a biological or what you want to call it a physiological reality as to how they work on the psyche and on the energy systems in person. I mean we use tobacco for, more for prayer - as a symbol of prayer. Also, as a way to release energy to the Creator, we use the sage more in the area for healing, for helping people to open up areas that need to be healed that are difficult. We use the cedar more for connecting with the earth, for strength. The sweetgrass more for uplifting the spirit, bringing in a positive kinds of energy. And a lot of the men understand that already. They have already a connection spiritually with their roots. With the medicines and with the circle it provides a familiar thing to identify with. [CC 06/19/98]

The counsellor seems to believe that despite the wide cultural diversity represented by the residents, they simply 'know' the lessons and meanings embodied by 'the Medicines'. In

some cases, 'the Medicines' (sweetgrass, sage) this counsellor is referring to have only been recently introduced to some of these cultural groups. A given plant may not even be indigenous to the environment a certain resident comes from. Further, this essentialized aboriginal identity in the House rhetoric is linked to an inherent spiritual energy that seems to reside in each and every resident. All residents, from the point of view of counsellors, are capable of releasing this spiritual energy. This same counsellor explained to me about the ubiquitous presence of the medicine wheel, and the difficulty he was experiencing in constructing a version of it that is as inclusive as possible.

> The medicine wheel as far as I know nobody really knows what it meant in the beginning. I know they have one out in Saskatchewan there. And they have them all around the world. I guess they have different places where the medicine wheels exist. People have really lost the notion of what they meant or everybody had a different idea. But I think recently people have put some meaning to it that seems to be useful. I think as a symbol it probably was a symbol of the forgotten past and then they took it and rejuvenated it by giving it a meaning that's relevant today. So there's all kinds of teachings today about the medicine wheel, you know. Some people use it for one thing and some people use it for another; it's very useful. Traditionally I think what - and that's another thing too - 'cause where ever a tribe is situated there's a different order to how they describe the medicine wheel or different colours or different spirit keepers are associated with different parts. I just took kind of a generic look at it; but it still isn't kind of generic enough for me 'cause I would like to include somehow the Inuit more in it. [CC 06/19/98]

Here the medicine wheel is seen as a pervasive and culturally universal symbol and vehicle of healing. Aboriginal cultures such as the Inuit, who apparently never practiced the medicine wheel historically, are beginning to "experience" its spiritual power. However, the very sparse historic and ethnographic information on the indigenous practice of the medicine wheel suggests that it could be of recent origin.[37] For the above counsellor, essentialized and romantic ideas about Aboriginality play a central role in his therapeutic work. At another point in our interview, he discussed the personal significance of these spiritual concepts that had become a meaningful way of life for him. Being of aboriginal ancestry himself, these generic

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[37] In the book, *The Invention of Tradition*, Hobsbawn and Ranger (1986) point out that all official "traditions" are created by governing elites and non-elites and serve the operation of power in a society. The medicine wheel may be an example of this social process. Given the impoverished state of many native communities, mental health and social service agencies in these communities often exert a high level of control over the lives of the people. In my opinion, currently there is an over pre-occupation with 'healing' in many native communities and an unwillingness on the part of researchers to critically reflect on this phenomenon as being part of a regime of social control.

beliefs and practices were part of a desire to evoke his sense of submerged nativeness and were related to his own healing journey in life.

In an interview with another counsellor, I found that she held notions about aboriginal peoples that were similar in many important respects to her colleague. This counsellor's ideas resembled what Kehoe (1990) referred to as cultural primitivism.[38] She concluded our interview by telling me about her perception of the House's role within "the Prophecies":

> I think it's obviously greater than the House; it's much greater than the House. It's something that's happening, as far as I can see, with the aboriginal communities. That's not just end of the story; that's just the beginning of the story. It's definitely at the individual family, to the community, to the nation, and the nation is the general part of the whole. I mean I have some understanding of some of the prophecies and the idea of balance within the medicine wheel being balance between the four peoples of the world and that we are all in that upward spiral. That gets into some kooky stuff about new age and what new age really means. But there's new age in Mohawk prophecy too. And it seems to me it's a general upward spiral; it's not a straight line by any means. If only it were but it's not. It's a definite spiral of movement that is happening and what is happening in the House is just a part of that. It's like little seeds; it's just like one dandelion that's putting out all those seeds and not all land on fertile ground by any means. But I don't think I really answered your question. . .
>
> [BL 06/23/98]

The counsellor's vision of the healing role of the House constructs it as part of a much greater social movement that is itself linked to an ancestral spiritual awakening. Obviously, her ideas correspond to the view reflected by the statements found in the Canadian government's Final Report as discussed earlier in this chapter. The vision sees aboriginal peoples as having a pressing responsibility on behalf of all humanity to enact a world order of racial harmony. For the House, the path of individual healing is linked to a predetermined path towards global healing. After all, it had been prophesied.[39]

In conclusion, the House's therapeutic ideology and practices construct an image of aboriginal identity that is woven into a rhetorical fabric of "community" and "healing". The identity being portrayed is for the most part a positive one that represents Aboriginality as located in a framework of spiritual awakening and renewal. As I have shown throughout this

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[38] Cultural primitivism, generally, is a discontent among "civilized" peoples with "civilization" and a search for a spiritually purer and simpler way of life, believed to be embodied among indigenous peoples.

[39] Many years ago as an undergraduate student I conducted ethnographic research on a group of 'sensitives' or New Age believers in Mission, British Columbia (see Pokotylo and Brass 1997). They had become convinced that a large anomalous boulder was emanating spiritual power. Their ideas about aboriginal people were very similar to those of these two counsellors. There is obviously some discursive overlap between their ideas.

chapter, however, this interweaving is also part of a pre-established discursive practice utilized by the Canadian State which, in turn, is rooted in the colonial encounter. On the other hand, Aboriginality does subsume the localized cultural identities of indigenous populations and is a source of identity more easily controlled, manipulated and promoted (for example, the mass media) by the dominant non-Native society. Thus, I am suggesting that the negative consequences of this discourse is that it can seriously challenge or even thwart local expressions of cultural identity (see for example, McIlwraith 1996). In the case of Nechi House residents, the discourse of Aboriginality may even lead to a sense of confusion of one's local identity or foster a sense of cultural inferiority, especially given the present hegemonic status of pan-Amerindian beliefs and values in recent decades.

## NCC and Narratives

The ideal function of NCC – that is, when the House's rhetoric of community and language of healing is effective – is to cultivate an attentive and supportive audience of residents and staff that will be receptive to a resident's stories. In sharing their narratives, residents may begin to recognize themselves in the experiences of others, thereby breaking the isolation and loneliness they may experience by withholding their memories of abuse, neglect, pain sadness, and trauma. When I asked a counsellor about the role of narratives in group she responded,

> They are essential. They are it. There is no therapy without their personal stories. One of the first things that I ask the counsellors to do when they are doing their initial evaluation is to do a loss history. That's only part of it. They at some point - if they have been working hard - they do 'genograms'; it's a bit like a family tree except you trace other things like addictions or family violence or all kinds of stuff. You can see that there is a pattern in how they - so that you can realize that you're not crazy after all; it's part of a system - a value system. Seeing it allows you to decide you are going to change it. There is a very fine balance between having the guys talk about their past histories and living in the past. In many ways they are quite right but you can't stay in talking about the past. You must also be able to step into the present. You have to understand how the past is effecting the present. Once you get some idea then you have to try and stay in the present. [BL 06/23/98]

Narratives are the most critical aspects of the therapeutic process. Akin to Ricoeur's ideas on self-reflection, in order for the narratives to be effective, residents must see themselves in a mirror of objects – in other words, in the stories they tell of themselves and to each other.

During some group sessions, a given resident's narrative had the effect of triggering a whole series of disclosures among other residents; it was very emotionally compelling (and devastating) to listen to these traumatic stories which were often expressed with deep sadness. The extreme pain and sense of loss felt by some residents was very evident. But another counsellor made it clear that despite the pain and sadness that must be expressed, the narratives should serve to transform that suffering:

> We use storytelling in a way that is transformative rather than just repetitive. So, yes, "we will hear your story about your pain and your sadness of your life but now how are you going to start telling your life stories about the future there? How are you going to tell your stories so that it becomes - what is that Robert Louis Stevenson said - that you become the hero of your own life?" And then questing for a vision like the other part I said is initiation - initiation meaning learning a new way of behaving, dealing with whatever blocks from the past that are preventing that new way of behaving and then developing that vision for the future, is what I mean by initiation. Initiation means to start something new, to start again, so you are letting go of stuff you don't need anymore and starting a new chapter in your life. The other thing that goes with that is the vision is how do you find the vision that is appropriate for you that is going to guide you. [CC 06/19/98]

The narratives of residents are fundamental to the therapeutic work of the clinical staff. Part of the work of counsellors is to facilitate the development, rehearsal and sharing of narratives. Without the narratives of residents the House would be not be a therapeutic environment. As the counsellor above discusses, the narratives must be transformative. A resident learns to articulate his past. He constructs a story about his past that locates the reasons for his inability to move forward in life. Once these reasons have been identified, he must look towards the future. His narratives of suffering are intended to become narratives of hope and renewal. Finally, all personal narratives are laden with meaning. "Group" serves as a venue where residents can draw upon these meanings and reflect on them in their own lives.

**Nechi House as a Polarized Space**

In the day to day reality of life in the House, NCC is not always about healing, nor is every session filled with emotional and gut-wrenching disclosures. Instead, over the course of my fieldwork, administrative and counselling staff spent several sessions of NCC trying to sniff out the presence and use of drugs by residents in the House. Alcohol, drug and substance

abuse, along with other criminal activity among residents, are recurrent problems in the House. Counsellors are all too aware that a few residents come to the House solely for the purpose of getting out of prison to re-establish contact with their drug suppliers before going back to their communities. Some residents just want to get out of prison and have no desire to change their lifestyles and little care about the therapy. In other cases, counsellors know that some residents are indeed trying to quit the drugs, but their addictive behaviour is overwhelming their efforts. Finally, many residents come to the House to escape this negative lifestyle and make every effort to change. But the presence and use of drugs in the House makes that goal much more challenging.

When a resident comes to the House, one of the first things he is asked to do is to read the House's rules and sign a contract to abide by them. The House does not permit the use of alcohol, drugs or substances among residents and, usually, a resident's parole conditions state that he must refrain from these activities. Part of the therapeutic agenda of requiring residents to make a commitment to the values of the community –caring, sharing, honesty and respect– is to convince the residents to help each other face up to their addictions. This is what is meant by a resident acting as a member of the Nechi community, and "keeping the Circle strong". As well, he demonstrates his respect for the Medicines through being honest about himself and towards the rest of the community. Finally, he practices the values of the community by coming to the aid of his fellow residents whose addictions overwhelm them.

But this strategy does not always work. Residents do frequently break the rules. Further, most residents are reluctant to interfere with other people's business and, generally, will not disclose information – referred to as "ratting" – about another resident's illegal activities. In the case of a first time offence when a resident has been caught drinking, he may agree to be "grounded" to the House for a period of thirty to ninety days. But in other cases, where individuals are suspected of using or trafficking drugs or substances, the House must resort to more coercive tactics, making threats, acting on these threats, and when suspicion warrants, bringing in drug sniffing dogs, conducting room searches, or sending residents for a "piss

test" – where their urine is tested for the presence of narcotics. How the counselling and administrative staff members react to those residents who break the rules depends on the attitude and disposition of the resident concerned. If he is remorseful and confesses, he may be grounded. On the other hand, if he seems indifferent or refuses to admit to his activities he will most likely be sent back to prison or even be charged with a criminal offence. Thus, confronting and dealing with the presence of drugs is a chronic problem. One counsellor described it in the following way:

> [The residents] tend to come out with a pen mentality. Like, this guy that has just gone a.w.o.l., I had some very interesting conversations with him. When we were talking about community, in that he had a responsibility as a community member to care not only for himself but for other people, and specifically in the case when he knew somebody else was using [drugs] he had a responsibility to go to that person and say, "Do you think this is the healthiest thing you are doing" His reaction was, "Well, I am not going to rat on anybody." And that's not what we are talking about. We are not talking about ratting. We are talking about you interacting with the community. I asked him, "What happened to - going back to traditional values - what happened to aboriginal - I mean I am non-native and I am pointing this out to him again and I am pointing to you an aboriginal person - the traditional values of sharing, caring, honesty, and respect? How does that fit in with your idea of ratting?" He couldn't answer. He did actually go and think about it. But it's a very difficult thing to get over. 'Cause again it's survival. Ratting or not ratting again is back to ritual. Everything, just about everything in life, can be reduced down to rituals. So it is difficult for them to adapt to the idea. They certainly do see (the House) as an institution when they come in.
>
> [BL 06/23/98]

Adopting the point of view of the resident, the counsellor suggests that he reads the space of the House quite differently from how she would ideally like to see him view it. From her perspective the issue seems to be more of a problem of the resident's perception. But in its day to day practices the House vacillates between acting as a supportive therapeutic community and as an authoritarian institution.

In fact, it is the House that initiates the heavy-handed tactics which make it appear more like an institutional environment. In some senses, though, the staff has no other choice. Failing to counteract the presence of drugs and criminal activity would seriously disrupt the therapeutic work, lead to a breakdown in lines of authority, and could even create a credibility problem for the House in the eyes of Correctional services. Though this has never happened at the House, such an extreme situation could possibly lead to the House being shut down by the Canadian and Quebec judicial systems. Finally, this vacillation between healing and punitive poles does

have some positive therapeutic effects. One could call it a form of "tough love" for a resident who must earn the care and support of his caregivers.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided an overview of Nechi House and its relationship to corrections. As well, I have discussed its therapeutic ideology and practices and its rhetoric of "community", arguing that it is following a pre-established discursive practice that constructs Aboriginality as a bureaucratic ethnic category. In turn, this bureaucratic definition has been coupled with more romantic and essentialized set of ideas, notions and themes about Aboriginality. Finally, I have attempted to demonstrate that the House, out of necessity, wavers between healing and disciplining poles in the course of its day to day operations.

The next chapter discusses the meanings of healing among residents and staff. By exploring the personal narratives of residents I demonstrate the strengths and limitations of Aboriginality as it relates to healing.

# Chapter Three

> Actually, all my life I ask myself, "When will, when am I going to feel better? When am I going to heal? When am I going to stop feeling like this?" I asked those questions all my life – waiting for myself to heal when it is not coming. 'Cause we just sit around – do nothing. If you don't try to create yourself into something it's not going to come. You have to try to make it happen. When you sit around smoking [dope], you go deeper and deeper and make yourself a hell of your life - that's all you do if you don't try to help yourself. But when you help yourself you could start to understand that somewhere along the line in the future – or in the future I can be better, if you do things in better ways. But you have to make that happen; it doesn't happen like candy in a machine. You have to work for it. You have to sweat. You have to even cry sometimes in order to make yourself free. This pain inside you it's like . . . cysts and swollen things . . . that make your skin hurt and you have a needle or sharp knife to get that puss out. And even when you take out that pus with a needle or a sharp knife, it doesn't heal right away; it usually starts to get better with time. When that pus goes out and your body, your skin starts to heal slowly. Same way with your soul – you have talk about it; cry about it so this pain will go away. Not just like that [snapping his fingers]. Slowly but surely starting to feel more at ease – do I make sense? That's how I see it – life itself. You have to talk about it. [DW Inuk 10/09/97]

For the men who come to the Nechi House with the intention of changing their lifestyles, to learn to control their addictions, and leave the cycle of criminal activity followed by incarceration, the experience of being at Nechi House can be an extremely difficult one. As this Inuk resident testifies, there is a great deal of pain involved in making personal disclosures of the horrible events in one's past. Among those residents whose motivations for coming to the House correspond to its mission of healing, there are different degrees of subscribing to the discourse of Aboriginality. That is, some residents fully immerse themselves in the House's rhetoric of a pan-Amerindian spirituality whereas others – especially two Inuit residents I interviewed – tended to distance themselves from it, though even these northern residents maintained a bemused and passive interest in the House's "Indian things". In this chapter I will discuss some of the notions about healing among residents and counsellors. Through a sampling of personal meanings of healing among residents I hope to illustrate that the discourse of Aboriginality has limits to its therapeutic applications. That is, in constructing their personal narratives, not all residents incorporate those discursive statements that essentialize and romanticize aboriginality; in other words, residents make their own paths towards personal healing.

**The Notion of Healing**

Among counsellors at the House the concept of "healing" has both personal and professional meanings. Professionally, healing refers to a process of psychological change and emotional vitality that results from psychotherapeutic intervention. The counsellors I interviewed and those whom I met over the course of my employment and fieldwork research were professionally trained in a variety of counselling methods and familiar with psychotherapeutic literature and theories. Both counsellors I interviewed emphasized the point that the House serves as a kind of safe space where residents could experiment with behaviour that was neutrally mirrored back to them over the course of the therapeutic intervention. The personal counselling style of a given counsellor appeared to be of little relevance in the eyes of these staff members. What matters most to the clinical team, they suggested, is that a counsellor be able to break through the sedimented behaviour a resident brings into the House, and which seems to be the source of his negative interaction with others. I asked a counsellor about the therapy program in an interview.

> GB: In your opinion, how does Nechi House therapy program work?
> BL: That's a very good question. It doesn't. I mean I just talked about standing on a chair. It wouldn't matter if we stood on our heads; it's not us. We give the guys an opportunity. We give the guys a space. And we give the guys some role modeling – a lot of role modeling. And we give them a lot of reflection in the sense that we reflect back to them. But apart from all that, that is a sort of opportunity. It's time out for many of them; it's a place for surprise, I think, for some of them because they sort of expect to be judged. They love it the minute they break a rule and they are grounded for something. They go, "Well, see, I told you so. You don't really love me." [BL 06/23/98]

For this staff member – and I would suggest that other counselling staff would likely agree – the House is like a stage with the staff acting as immovable props or mirrors. The responsibility of staff is to increase the volume of the dialogue and magnify certain forms of interaction among residents. Hence, the therapeutic model of the House as a kind of therapeutic community composed of members both permanent (staff) and temporary (residents). A counsellor's interventions serve to confront a resident with an image of his own behaviour and present him with two alternatives: accept the reflection and willingly change the negative behaviour with their care and support, or reject the reflection and continue the behaviour at the

risk of losing their care and support. In accepting the reflection, "healing" becomes a process of mastering the skill of introspection and then achieving a state of balance in one's life. Significantly, counsellors help residents in creating and facilitating the sharing of their personal narratives. Group work serves as a venue for self-reflection. As discussed in the previous chapter, personal narratives are critical aspects to a resident's healing journey. A healing journey is a personal route of recovery and renewal through narrated time. In more clinical terms, healing can be understood as behavioral modification and personal development linked to one's interaction with others.[40]

On a personal level, however, healing is intimately tied to the spiritual outlooks of the two counsellors I interviewed; their personal perspectives cannot be easily separated from their professional ones. This is partly due to a restorative notion of balance in the therapeutic ideology of both counsellors. This therapeutic stance essentializes the self. As discussed in the previous chapter, both counsellors felt that the work of the House was linked to a greater social and spiritual movement, and is rooted to the counsellors' views of the self as a source of spiritual energy. A male counsellor conceived of the self as a core of energy surrounded by a shell that blocked the natural flow of energy that every person is born with. For him, cultural socialization and the traumas of life inhibit this natural spontaneity. "Healing for me is starting to try and get into touch with that core and revitalize it and helping it break through the outer layer." [CC 06/19/98] Regaining balance, then, implies reconnecting with one's inherent life energy and allowing one's body to become a kind of spiritual conduit in the world. In the counsellor's view, native ceremonies, such as smudging and sweatlodging, act as a way of cleansing the body so this energy will flow more freely.

Importantly, healing operates at both personal and collective levels. These ideas are linked to the counsellors' interests in native spirituality. Both counsellors are committed to the latter's growth or, more correctly, regeneration:

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[40] According to my limited understanding of group psychotherapy gleamed from Irving Yalom's (1995) decades of clinical practice and research, the House's therapy does correspond to many of his observations. As I am neither familiar with the literature nor trained in group psychotherapy I can only suggest that the similarities exist.

> GB: You mentioned a while earlier, the spiritual aspect of the House was increasing exponentially. What do you mean by that?
> BL: Well, that everyone now is being made aware of – like everyone outside of the counselling staff. . . like, we do ceremonies at staff meetings. I've tried to encourage staff members who are not, who do not have anything pressing to do to come into the morning smudge and be part of that circle. And, surprisingly, few people have taken that up. We have smudges in the morning. I think we are re-introducing people to spiritual ceremonies in the sense that – like at camp, [a Mohawk resident's] girlfriend. . . we invited his girlfriend to smudge the sweatlodge for us and he asked her if she wanted to come and join us. And she didn't know anything about smudging – which is peculiar; I mean, isn't it? A British woman and a South American woman introducing a Mohawk woman to smudging. . . . once we've invoked spiritual help, it's there for us and for the [residents] and there's that sense of it, some of them do it and some of them don't. But it's there. [BL 23/10/98]

Healing is spiritual. This point is critical to this counsellor and her colleague's involvement with the House. Yet a matter that appears to puzzle this counsellor is the seeming hesitancy among some staff members (many of whom are of native ancestry) to partake in ceremonies which, in her view, are or should be "natural" to most native peoples. In particular, she is quite taken by the idea that she and another counsellor introduced a person of native ancestry – a Mohawk – to a native spiritual practice. The question, then, that comes to mind here is, are these counsellors simply (re-)introducing or are they, in fact, inventing cultural practices for some of their native clientele and staff?

Finally, both of these counsellors related personal narratives that were inextricable from their immersion in the discursive practices of the House. Specifically, their professional involvement with the House, in many ways, has made sense of the experiences in their own lives and given them a strong sense of purpose in their futures. In the case of the counsellor from the United Kingdom, during the course of the interview, she admitted to me that leaving the UK has created a deep sense of cultural and geographic displacement – or in her own words, "I was stolen by Gypsies and captured by Indians. I have terrible trouble identifying myself." [NG 06/23/98]. The counsellor discussed the experience of being subjected to extremely hostile language discrimination in a homogenous and strongly separatist Quebecois town when she and her family first came to Canada. These negative experiences cultivated a sense of affinity with an English-speaking Cree community near the town where she lived – almost literally driving her towards it while she was volunteering with the community's social services.

Since that time, and over the course of working with the House, she has witnessed acts of overt, sometimes even brutal, racism towards native residents by officials within the judicial system. That sense of affinity for native culture and desire to work for the betterment of native peoples has become entrenched in her life, becoming a lifelong purpose. In short, the act of configuring the meaningful experiences of her past within a discourse of Aboriginality and then reflecting upon the narratives that emerge has helped the counsellor to situate herself temporally and given her a direction towards the future. The spiritual overtones drawn from her self-reflections are, in my view, not all that surprising. If anything, in a profession concerned with personal suffering (especially that of people who are politically oppressed and socially marginalized) placing severe emotional and psychological burdens on a caregiver, the search for esoteric or spiritual meanings should be expected.

**Healing Among Residents**

Compared with counselling staff, residents of the House demonstrate more varied ideas about healing. Importantly, for a resident who does take the initiative to change his life with the care and support of the counselling staff, he must be predisposed to the idea that he *can* be healed. Without this mindset and attitude a resident will, in all likelihood, not benefit from his experiences at the House. In the quote from the Inuk resident at the beginning of this chapter we can see this pre-disposition to being healed: he reports frequently asking himself, "When am I going to feel better? When am I going to heal? When am I going to stop feeling like this?" Among residents the notion of healing corresponds to the counselling rhetoric. They learn the meanings of healing through group and individual psychotherapy. And they acquire the meanings of healing from each other. But it must be noted that residents have different degrees of commitment to the therapeutic rhetoric. Their definitions of and differing commitments to healing – 'respecting the medicines' – reflect unevenness in intensity. This ambivalence is seen especially in relation to those discursive statements in the therapeutic context that homogenize their diverse religious and spiritual backgrounds.

**What are "the Medicines"?**

The Medicines – cedar, sage, sweetgrass, etc. – and the therapeutic talk that surrounds them are synonymous with "healing". To respect the Medicines one implicitly respects and is committed to a healing journey. One Inuk resident presented the medicines in the following way,

> About medicine. It's a . . . in order to . . . like we here [at the House] because we have problem. We were sent to jails time and time again because we have problems ourselves. The way I understand it, we have – in earlier time of our life – something happened to us and that's not normal. That what keep us going back to jail all the time. In order for us to stop going back to jail and have problems in our lives, we have to go through healing journey. So that's when the, the medicines you say, when medicine, like you say, that's when medicine got involved, have to be involved. [LB 10/29/97]

But this Inuk resident and the one cited previously did not show a great interest in the House's pan-Amerindian spirituality, partly symbolized in the rhetoric surrounding the medicines. Though they were willing to respect "the Medicines" and the pan-Amerindian rhetoric that surrounded it as a spiritual practice among their southern 'Indian' neighbours, these two Inuit residents saw this therapeutic practice as culturally foreign. In addition, both of them seemed to be strongly influenced by Christianity. In fact, the father of one of the Inuk residents was an Anglican minister and he had even contemplated becoming a minister himself. Yet, the counselling staff at the House seems to assume that all residents, by virtue of their native ancestry, are interested or at least open to their practices of pan-Amerindian spirituality.

An example of the tendency among Inuit residents to distance themselves from the House's rhetoric and practices is an incident related by one of the Inuk residents which took place over the summer where a conflict of interpretation emerged between him and the counsellors. He reported to the staff that there was a persistent knocking on his door and shaking of his bed. He was convinced a fellow resident was playing a trick on him but found this allegation hard to substantiate. Counsellors at the House offered him a different explanation.

> LB: Yeah, someone was trying to make me believe it was some kind of spirit. At first, they said it was a bad spirit.
> GB: Who was saying it was a bad spirit?
> LB: One of the counsellors.
> GB: A counsellor?

> LB: I don't remember. And it turned it. . . One of the counsellors say it was the spirit keeper of the west doing that. Then after a period of time, another person was saying it was my dead brother doing that. And after a period of time, that same person, she [a counsellor] told me it was - just ignore it.
> GB: So what do you think?
> LB: I don't think it was spirits.
> GB: You don't really believe in spirits?
> LB: No. [LB 11/5/97]

The resident resisted counsellors' interpretations and eventually the counselling staff relented. His personal beliefs did not allow for a more esoteric interpretation. However, when I asked him if he was interested in the native spirituality of the House, he claimed that since he was 'part Indian himself' he thought it might be good for him to know at least something about it. But for the most part, his and the other Inuk resident's communities were still strongly Anglican. Both reported that much of the pre-contact Inuit religious beliefs and spiritual practices seemed far removed. Similarly, the Inuk resident quoted at the beginning of this chapter made it clear that his willingness to partake in the House's native spirituality was motivated more out of compliance rather than a genuine interest:

> Medicines, actually, for being an Inuk, I'm not really – how would you call it? Well, there's a lot of names for medicines. I really can't say what they're called. I would have to hear it again in order to call it. To me, that's how it is; I don't know very much about Indian things. But to tell myself to respect how it works around here. I have to get along with, with fairly strange things for an Inuk, strange things. . . . at first they were very strange cause in my life I never prayed to God. Like they call Him, Creator, and with this smoke [the medicines]. I never prayed like this before in my life before I came here. But I have to respect other cultures – how they pray and try to understand that. I mean try to see them just the same way as I would pray. I respect believers in what they believe like myself. I am a believer to something greater to myself. So I have to respect people when they pray to this Creator, they call him. And myself, I just call him God. [DW 10/9/97]

For the Inuit residents mentioned above, the pan-Amerindian spirituality of the House is foreign to the cultural practices of their own communities, where Christianity has been a strong socializing force for many decades (personal communication August 1999, Louis Jacques Dorais and Dorais 1999). Pan-Amerindian spirituality is conceived of as distinctively 'Indian and southern' (ibid.). Nevertheless, these two residents, based on my observations, did commit themselves to a "healing journey". They simply distanced themselves from those elements which appeared culturally incompatible. However, this more passive approach to healing was not always evident among some of their southern counterparts at the House.

**Jack**

For some "southern" residents, "the Medicines" as symbols of a generic Indianness may seem culturally familiar and personally relevant. Jack, the resident discussed in the introduction, understood "the Medicines" as being an important part of an ancient but "suppressed" pan-Amerindian tradition:

> GB: When they talk about the medicines, what do they talk about? When they say, "Respect the medicines."
> JB: I don't know, traditional medicines. They talk about when you're smudging and - I don t know - medicines could be even powerful words.
> GB: How do you mean powerful words could be medicines?
> JB: Words that move you. Words that make you feel something. Those are powerful; that's medicine. It's all symbolic of everything.
> GB: These things we just talked about, are they important to you?
> JB: The medicines? They have, they are important to me. I don't know about if they actually have a physical effect on me. But they do have an emotional feeling to them. They belong to the way things been done for centuries. A long time ago this is how things were done. And now they're still being done; it's part of our past. It's the relationship with earth.
> [JB 10/10/97]

Jack articulates a complex understanding of the power of rhetoric. Words have a medicinal effect: a power to move the listener away from the source of his suffering, to heal him. Later in the interview Jack commented that he did not necessarily believe that 'medicine men' possessed special supernatural powers but employed a ritualistic and symbolically rich form of talk therapy to empower the sufferer, a perspective also held by Jerome Frank (see *Persuasion and Healing* 1991).[41] Yet, simultaneously, Jack holds that these pan-Amerindian traditions are "ancient" and "natural", these qualities being, in effect, the sources of its power. That is, 'the medicines' are, perhaps, more culturally *authentic* than other forms of healing, especially western psychotherapy. This cultural authenticity is rooted in his perception of these practices as being traditional or "the way things [had] been for centuries." Furthermore, these practices are seen as linked to a relationship with the Earth and thus purer forms of healing.

Among the residents I met with and interviewed, Jack was among the most responsive to the House's therapeutic program. Jack had been adopted out of his family and had little or no contact with his Saulteaux community. His adopted life, he reported, was very troubled; he has little or no contact with his adopted family, either. In short, Jack's life before he came to the

[41] Jerome Frank's main contention is that a healer uses rhetoric to resuscitate the morale of the sufferer.

House was marked by periods of alcohol and drug abuse, criminal activity and transience. Jack spoke of searching for a Native identity and he would occasionally travel and live with other Native people. He was admitted to the House after being told about it by a person within the correctional system. For the most part, Jack demonstrated a deep commitment to the therapy and had a great deal of respect for the staff. When I met Jack, he was in the process of changing his adopted last name – what he referred to as a 'slave name' – to his birth name. Jack was interested in native issues and was very politically active and committed to social change. He was even involved in the Oka crisis and felt that it was among the most significant events in his life.

Jack's political sympathies for militant native social movements became the source of a conflict between a number of residents and the staff of the House. The issue was over the flying of the 'Mohawk Warrior' flag or the 'Aboriginal Solidarity' flag (see figure 1) on a pole at the intensive therapy camp. Staff reacted very strongly and swiftly to its presence at the camp. According to the staff, several years previously a resident had worn a jacket with this same image into a nearby summer cottage town. A local French newspaper sensationalized its sighting, claiming that members of the Hell's Angels and the Mohawk Warrior society were occupying the local church-owned camp where the House holds its summer healing retreats. The House's board members and staff were forced to meet with mayors from the surrounding towns to respond to the public outcry that resulted from this ludicrous media coverage. Following a group meeting, Jack and the residents who put the flag up reluctantly took it down. He related to me his feeling about the incident:

> JB: Yeah, I got mad at that. Because, people view it as a bad thing. . . . and they didn't know what it was about. It's just typical. It's like looking at . . . some bum on the street. You don't know where he's been. You don't know what he's done. But you can classify him. You can make a judgment and say well he's nothing because he doesn't have a fucking job. He's a bum; that's all he'll be and that's all he'll ever be. But it's not that way. If you at least stop and ask that person how he is, what happened to him and how come he's that way and you'll get a whole different view. But no one will take the time to understand and appreciate that flag and what it's about.
> GB: For you, what is that flag about?
> JB: It's about a pride. It's about a way, a dream that's been going on for a long time: an interconnection through you to others - uniting everybody. Uniting everybody; it's a great dream. It's a great thing to accomplish. I'll stand by it regardless of whatever may happen.
> [JB 10/03/97]

## Aboriginal Solidarity Flag / Mohawk Warrior Society Flag

(Photo credit: Michael Rice, Fresh Pine Productions)

This flag is associated with the 'Oka Crisis of 1990'. The 'Oka Crisis' was a seventy-eight day standoff between militant Mohawk protesters and the Surete du Quebec and the Canadian Army. The dispute originated over the proposed expansion of a municipal golf course into a disputed area known as 'the Pines' near Kanesatake / Oka, Quebec. On July 11, 1990 a SQ tactical team launched an armed assault against the Mohawk protesters. In the ensuing gun battle a police tactical officer, Corporal Marcel Lemay, was killed. The crisis rapidly escalated when sympathizers in Kahnawake, another Mohawk community on the south shore of Montreal, blocked the Pont Mercier Bridge. Eventually, the Canadian Army was called in to relieve civilian police authorities. 'The Crisis' ended on September 26, 1990.

The flag is a facial profile of an Iroquois warrior within the rays of the sun set on a deep red background. It is an evocative and striking image. "The Aboriginal Solidarity flag" is its official name, given by its creator, the late Louis Karoniaktajeh Hall, a grassroots Mohawk political activist, artist and writer who revitalized the militant warrior society in Kahnawake Mohawk Territory, Quebec during the 1970's, 80's and 90's. Its more popular name, the "Mohawk Warrior Society flag", comes from the media. The media associated it with the open show of armed force by Mohawks who belonged to this militant group.

Jack's own narrated journey is woven across a broad tapestry of Aboriginality; it incorporates seemingly incompatible statements of militancy and resistance with statements of healing and spirituality. Further, he admitted that through his late teens and early twenties he sought out the company of other native people and traveled to different native communities. He was trying to acquire an "authentic" source of a native identity – something he felt was severely lacking in his own life. As both of us were of Saulteaux ancestry he was appreciative of what minimal cultural and historical knowledge I could share with him.

One final point regarding Jack concerns a ceremony, mentioned earlier, that I witnessed in which he took part. During camp, the counsellors conducted a ceremony they said was a Cree Indian mourning ceremony. According to them, the ceremony was used to help people who were having difficulty in overcoming their grief for a lost loved one. A boulder – or gravestone – was suspended on a rope and pulled between two competing parties in a tug of war. The object was to bring the stone to the gravesite of the loved one against the wishes of those who could not overcome the death. In Jack's case the counsellors wanted him to address the loss of his mother and confront his sense of failure and worthlessness. The counsellors constructed a mock gravesite with a cross and plastic skull and pulled Jack away from it. When it did not seem to have the desired effect – Jack was resisting the therapy – they reversed it so he pulled the stone towards the grave. While he fought against the counsellors, they mocked and humiliated him. Eventually Jack became engrossed in the action of pulling and was visibly angry. When the counsellors saw Jack was tiring and becoming too upset, they stopped and began to console him. Jack buried his face in the ground and cried for a very long time over the loss of his mother, the desertion of his adopted family and his insatiable thirst to be accepted and loved.

> I remember crawling on the floor when I did . . . that ceremony. I was crawling and I can't remember why I was crawling but I knew I was crawling. I don't know where I was going. I was crying and just letting go. I don't know why I was doing that. Some people gave me an idea: maybe it was shame; maybe it's part of that or something else. That's why it's important why I find out. Maybe something happened before I was five. Maybe that's what made me cry - something when I was a little baby, looking for something, somewhere to go, maybe go and hide, maybe to go towards somebody. I can't figure it out. Maybe if I do it again I'll figure it out. I was thinking of doing it again. [JB 10/17/97]

The 'figuring it out' is the preliminary stage to emplotment. Jack is trying to establish a sequence of memories of symbolic actions that will account for his life in the present day and provide meanings from which to draw upon for the future. Jack's narrative of personal healing is unfolding within a pan-Amerindian spiritualism that borrows, contrives, and modifies the cultural practices of local indigenous populations.

## The Prodigal Son

> It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found. (Luke 15: 32)

Samson is a Naskapi in his late forties whom I first met at the intensive camp retreat. He had arrived at the House near the end of my fieldwork. He had come to the House from a provincial institution after serving a short sentence for charges related to impaired driving and resisting arrest. He was experiencing prolonged withdrawal symptoms from drug addiction. One afternoon during a break in programs I was sitting in the main room of the dilapidated clubhouse where "group" was held. Samson walked up to where I was sitting and introduced himself to me. He had heard I was an anthropology graduate student and wanted to talk to me. He began by telling me about his own work as an informant and translator for a number of anthropologists and historians who had come to his community to conduct ethnographic research. His earliest involvement as a translator began at ten years of age. Over the next three decades, he worked with many well-known academics who exposed him to everything from the exploitative relations the Naskapi experienced at the hands of fur traders, to the militant revolutionary writings of the budding American Indian Movement in the late 1960's. For the most part, Samson was grateful for the research opportunities, since they had provided him access to cultural and historical knowledge that he would not normally have acquired on his own. Further, the experiences had shaped him into a competent and broad-minded political representative for his community, leading to lifelong employment in government negotiations with his community. At the same time, however, the responsibilities of this position fostered

intense jealousy among his peers, some of whom violently attacked him for his work on behalf of the community and accused him of "selling out" his people to the 'whiteman'.

Although Samson claimed to have had a good upbringing by responsible but strict parents, and shown strong motivation and self-efficacy throughout his life, he admitted to being emotionally and spiritually drained from the burdens of his political work. His first experimentation with drugs occurred while living in Montreal as a young student. Living in Montreal during the early 70's exposed him to the counter-culture movement active at this time. Samson started smoking marijuana, then used LSD, and within six months was frequently snorting cocaine supplied for free by a non-native southern friend who came from a wealthy Montreal family. Samson suggested the drug abuse and ensuing emotional toll stemmed from what he referred to as "PCSS" – post-cultural stress syndrome. He felt that the rapid movement from a traditional bush life of hunting caribou to a fast and intoxicating city life of defending native rights had been just too much to handle. The drug abuse became a lasting habit following him through two decades and took its toll on his relationship with his wife and children. At the time of our interviews, he was in the process of leaving his wife, who was also struggling from alcoholism and drug abuse. Much of our conversation revolved around a blossoming love affair that had developed over the course of the months he had been at the House. He became re-acquainted with a former love that he had met in Montreal in the early 70's. The relationship showed great promise, as she was also a northern native woman who shared many similar life experiences, ambitions and personal tribulations. Importantly, she had recently begun her own healing journey and was patiently awaiting his successful completion of the House's program. Samson was deeply enchanted by finding this former love, but struggled with ambivalent feelings for his estranged wife.

Samson related to me his personal notions of healing. In many ways, they parallel the cultural eclecticism of the therapeutic discourses of the House. He was also interested in the House's native spirituality. His own cultural background and upbringing in Naskapi bush life

predisposed him to the search for spiritual meaning. He related an experience as an adolescent when he had his first hunting vision:

> Yeah, my first time I visioned . . . I was in camp. I was with an elder. It happened through that time growing up. I had to leave [university] just to hunt cause the [counter / drug] culture I was caught up in. And this happened in October 1970 at the end of September. We were in a camp and I had this - a vision in my sleep. I dreamt I was carrying on a backpack, a yearling, a Caribou, a one-year-old caribou. And I was that day before the dream, I was with this elder. The other men were out [hunting] on the land and they came back that evening. They were on a freighter, a boat. And the next morning we were having breakfast. During the dream - the dream I had was very clear. So I told them I had this dream and I told them what I had saw. And they didn't say anything. So after breakfast we moved out and we had to walk. We took the boat, a freighter. And we got off after about an hour - out of the freighter. And we walked about ten miles and we came to this place in the bush. And in the clearing there was a yearling. And one of the men said, "There's your vision." They had killed a caribou the day before and they didn't tell us - when they were out. So I can say that - I consider that as a vision. Like they had shot a yearling too. [SS 11/01/97]

This narrative of a hunting vision corresponds to the ethnographic work of Adrian Tanner (1979), which shows that hunting among some northern peoples serves as a form of spiritual questing. Samson's own hunting vision was culturally appropriate to local Naskapi practices. Yet, Samson drew upon alternative discursive sources to account for his present-day emotional pain and need for spiritual redemption. For instance, Samson informed me that during the 1970's he first understood he had a problem with drugs after listening to the Eagles' song, 'Hotel California'.[42] He also related to me that he had recently been having dreams which he felt were forms of spiritual instruction. During one of our conversations at camp he asked me if I knew about a song called 'Prodigal Son' apparently sung by Neil Young.[43] He then proceeded to tell me about a dream he had had. He recalled an old woman in the dream. As well, he remembers looking at a compact disk by Neil Young. On its cover was an eagle. One of the songs on the compact disk was called Prodigal Son. He asked me if I knew what the Prodigal Son was about. He interpreted this dream to mean that he needed to understand the lyrics to the song. Further, he believed that the eagle on the compact disk cover, as well as the rock band that first awakened him to his addiction, implied that this animal might be his spiritual

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[42] The song offers a compelling description of the sense of entrapment caused by drug addiction.

[43] I called a radio station to inquire about Samson's query. The DJ said Billy Idol, another popular rock musician, sings the song. As far as he knew, Neil Young never recorded a song by that name. The Prodigal Son is a parable in the New Testament (Luke 15: 11-32) where a man with two sons loses one to a wanton lifestyle. The 'blacksheep' of the family eventually mends his ways and returns to redeem the honour of his father. Basically, it is a moral instruction that sometimes individuals must hit rock bottom in order to recover.

totem. In constructing his narratives of recovery and renewal, Samson drew from a diverse set of discursive sources: Naskapi hunting culture, Christian / Biblical parables and even popular rock music.

Not unexpectedly, Samson was very receptive to the House's pan-Amerindian spiritualism. He was deeply committed to "the Medicines". And like Jack, he was disturbed by the behaviour of fellow residents who did not show respect towards the suffering of others. Samson discussed a circle ceremony he attended outside the House[44] that demonstrates his genuine interest in pan-Amerindian spirituality.

> SS: And I managed to bring in my medicine wheel to the circle. At that time . . . there was a sweat lodge conductor there in the circle. And she told the circle, when it was her turn to speak that I had brought in my medicine wheel there. . . . first I brought in the grandfathers and grandmothers. . . . and then the medicine wheel came in there.
> GB: What do you mean you brought your medicine wheel in there?
> SS: I don't know. When I was talking something came into the circle. This sweatlodge conductor, I guess, saw it and sensed it through her power. And she told me what I had in the four directions: in the east, golden eagle; and in the south, snake; and to the west, an owl; and to the north a weasel; and that I'm bear clan. I never knew I had these things. [SS 11/01/97]

Samson presents these images as if they had been invoked from within him. The sweat lodge conductor is portrayed as a person gifted with spiritual powers that allowed her to draw these internalized beings out of him. Samson demonstrates his receptivity to pan-Amerindian spirituality and incorporates those discursive statements that help to construct a path towards personal healing. Yet, at the end of the quote he adds, "I never knew I had these things." This comment points to a paradox: on the one hand, pan-Amerindian spirituality is part of the discursive construction of Aboriginality; on the other, this part of the discourse powerfully constructs the world of its aboriginal subjects – an ethereal state of being in the world is experienced as "always" and eternally existing.

In terms of narrative, Samson later related to me how this same sweatlodge conductor or Medicine woman suggested to him that the troubles in his life may be related to "bad medicine"; that is, he may have been living his life under a curse willed by an envious person. He referred to this curse as a "Bear Walk" where his spirit is under the influence of malevolent

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[44] It is common for residents to attend self-help groups beyond the House. The staff encourages such activity.

forces.[45] Although he is aware that there was certainly free will in his life choices, i.e. who he married, the drugs he used, the decision to leave his wife, the curse is one where danger and trouble seem capable of finding him. In one instance he told me a story of one time when he went hunting during the winter. He and his hunting party split up to find an animal. After a long period of no luck he went back to their truck. He decided to shorten the journey by attempting to scale down a bluff and in doing so nearly fell to his death. On another occasion, when he and wife had split up, he was working as a consultant for other native communities. He used his truck to sleep in, often on the perimeters of the communities when he was consulting. One night as he was sleeping, he was confronted by a group of men from the community who accused him of chasing their women and threatened to beat him up. He managed to escape. He claimed their accusations were false and he had not been looking to create any problems for himself. But he wondered why these men went after him and how they found him. He gave many instances in his life where trouble just seemed to find him. Locating these tales within a larger spiritual framework of meaning served to partially explain them.

Throughout the time I knew Samson at the House he demonstrated a consistent and strong commitment to the House's therapeutic program and immersed himself in its rhetoric of healing. Since late adolescence and his early twenties, pan-Amerindian ideas and themes had been a prevalent influence in his life, i.e. the counter-culture of the early seventies as well as the American Indian Movement. Arguably, the House's therapeutic program is a possible extension of the romantic aspirations of that social movement which Samson was already sympathetic to. Nevertheless, Samson articulated a deep resolve to overcome the personal tribulations of his life. This resolve has become a journey of personal healing, a narrative of his past that projects into the future.

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[45] The term "Bear Walk" as a caricature of selfhood others the person it refers to. Further, a" walk" suggests a sense of (narrated) movement across time and space.

## Conclusion

Residents and Nechi House staff have a diverse set of definitions and commitments to healing or 'the Medicines'. For Inuit residents, pan-Amerindian spirituality is regarded as culturally foreign but something they will respect insofar as it is a means to an end. For residents such as Jack and Samson, pan-Amerindian spirituality appears to be more culturally relevant and has greater personal significance. For them, the discourse of Aboriginality becomes a backdrop for their personal narratives of suffering and renewal. Discourse and narrative serve to construct a sense of selfhood that, in practice, appears to escape the boundaries of language. One's sense of self is viewed as having emerged solely from internal experiences, memories and potentials. Identity is presented as something that needs to be awakened and brought forth. The social origins of identity are largely ignored. Thus, the discursive sources of identity woven into one's personal narratives pass unnoticed.

# Chapter Four

> TM: [F]rom maximum to medium [federal institutions] the thinking is not different. But from there to here [Nechi House] it's a lot different. Because over there you wouldn't even dare tell on each other. Over here everybody tells on everybody - well, most of the guys do; they tell on each other.
> GB: In prison you can get killed for that?
> TM: Yeah.
> GB: Why is that such a strong rule?
> TM: I don't know. Some guy - probably the first guy that went in to prison - invented that rule. [TM 10/18/97]

> One of the residents here said I was a 'rat'. Apparently, it wasn't me. And [the counsellors] said one of the [residents] said that to one of the [drug pushers] on the street. [The drug pusher] said, "We'll fix him." That was a laugh 'cause I had stuff happen to me in the 'joint'. It was sort of exciting 'cause I was like, "I'm back in with the crime! They want to play the game, I'll play the game!" You know? [MM 10/22/97]

For some residents at Nechi House it is difficult, if not nearly impossible, to separate their experiences in prison, and the thinking that goes with these experiences, from the time they spend at the House. Although these residents may clearly recognize that the House is not prison, the problems of prison and the "ethical system" among incarcerated populations – "the con code"[46] – (do) seem to follow them into the House's therapeutic space. The narratives of the two residents above, both of whom came from federal institutions, reflect these concerns and tensions at Nechi House. These two residents subscribed to a set of discursive practices (forms of self-surveillance along with a set of ideas and practices) particular to a previous space. In other words, being a prisoner became their sense of identity, and they carried this identity into the House.

This chapter explores how residents perceive and interact with the space of Nechi House. As I argued in Chapter Two, the space of the House may be understood as a kind of text comprised of metaphorical meanings that are invoked through practice. Residents and staff read and interpret that text through their repeated actions in that space. In other words, the space of the House represents a kind of readable text that is analogous to language. Interaction

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[46] Generally, "the con code" is a code of conduct among inmates. For one, an inmate never discloses information about another inmate to prison authorities. This act of disclosure is referred to as "ratting" and the person responsible is called a "rat". Second, one never asks another inmate about the nature of his crime. In fact, most personal information is kept closely hidden from others. I can only provide a meager amount of information on this subject. For the most part, the code is a form of resistance among prisoners in the face of The System.

with this spatial text is a form of dialogue that speaks to the larger social order. Specifically, repeated actions within the House serve to invoke the symbolic meanings of all its public and private spaces. By exploring the metaphors contained within vignettes taken from my fieldwork experiences, I will show how residents construct conflicting interpretations of the space of Nechi House. These conflicting interpretations are derived from the subjective experiences of residents and staff. As well, it must be kept in mind that all residents come to the House with a diverse set of subjective experiences of prison. Finally, the construction of one's identity within the discursive space of the House can be highly contextual to it. In other words, the narrated self that emerges in the House must carry forward into a similar discursive space in order for the resident to maintain a sense of coherency and continuity in their healing journey.

**"What is prison *like*?"**

Among residents the experience of imprisonment has a wide array of meanings. Most reject the popular media images of prison: excessive violence, gang rapes, brutal guards, daring escapes by tragic heroes, etc. Instead most residents discussed their experiences in prison life as daily exercises in deception and monotony. Often they described spending their time and effort trying to score some drugs. Others learned to hustle fellow inmates by creating illegal gambling rackets or made "moonshine" which they sold to their fellow inmates. Some boasted about their association with "bikers" from the "Hells Angels" or the "Rock Machine", two violent rival motorcycle gangs heavily involved in organized crime. Others spoke of educational and employment opportunities, such as learning a trade like automobile mechanics or woodworking. Most of those from federal institutions were active with the Native Brotherhood[47] chapters in prison and took part in sweatlodges and ceremonies conducted by native Elders whose spiritual services were facilitated by correctional staff. Many of the residents had also participated in some psychotherapeutic interventions offered to them during their incarceration. I recall some newly arrived residents peppering their dialogue in "group"

[47] The Native Brotherhood is an association of Native inmates, mostly in federal institutions. They are the lobbying voice for the concerns and needs of aboriginal inmates and are recognized by the prison authorities.

with psychological terminology, discussing their need for an "addiction plan" since they were "regressing", or requiring a course on "anger management". And some residents did admit to experiencing or witnessing acts of brutal violence while incarcerated. They related that most of the time the perpetual and tacit threat pervading the prison atmosphere that some form of harm could befall them if they were not careful enough to watch themselves; this included being physically or sexually assaulted, even murdered.[48] But one pervasive theme among all residents was a view that all penitentiary settings are full of people who have some obvious personal problems and have resigned themselves to a state of misery. This state of misery is widespread among inmates. One Inuk resident shared his experiences of being in provincial institutions:

> DW: Oh, hard times. Prison is hard life. In prison you become rock. You have to live by prisoner rules.
> GB: What are some of these rules?
> DW: You don't whistle. You cannot whistle inside the prison.
> GB: What do you mean whistle?
> DW: Like – [cheerful and expressive whistling] – like that. You whistle like that and anybody, somebody, can smash you in the face with no mercy.
> GB: Just because you are whistling?
> DW: Because you are whistling, it means you're a happy person inside prison.
> GB: So they [other inmates] want to make you feel miserable?
> DW: Yeah. They don't . . . It's miserable inside prison. They don't want to see anybody happy inside prison. You kind of . . . Well, if you see someone happy inside prison [other inmates] get jealous right there, right then. They get mad.
> GB: For being a happy person?
> DW: For being a happy person [laughing]. [DW 09/10/97]

Counselling staff at the House reported that they find many newly arrived residents to be extremely egotistical. That is, these residents seem to show little empathy towards their fellow residents and very much keep to themselves. Likewise, some residents I interviewed spoke of cutting themselves off emotionally from family, friends and intimate relationships when faced with the prospect of going to prison. "Doing one's time" requires an adjustment to a constant state of emotional isolation.

> TN: I did my time on my own. I started my time by my own. And I finished by my own. That's the way I look at it. I don't want to do nothing to distract me from the outside. If I was going to do time then I was just going to do time.

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[48] When I worked with the House I conducted prison visits in federal prisons. Some of the inmates I met who had a long career in prison did report that they experienced or witnessed a lot of violence. For instance, one inmate reported to me that over the course of his sentences he witnessed nine murders of fellow inmates. However, such self-reports should be taken with a grain of salt since 'surviving the violence' of prison for some persons can be a source of personal identity.

> It's hard to do time when someone is fucking around with your head from the outside, you know?
> GB: Like, what would somebody do to do that?
> TN: Well, if you had a girlfriend and you were inside, she could play with your head - say something, some unpleasant thing. Or even your brothers. Your brothers, if they say they want to do something and you're stuck. And that thing never comes - that time never comes - and it's very upsetting, you know?
> I would rather cut everybody off and do my time. I only call home when I just need to speak to them. But I never ask them anything. I even told them, "If you're ever going to promise me things, send me things. Don't tell me. Just send them to me if you're going to send them to me. If you don't want to send it to me, then don't send it to me. I won't be expecting it. Just that I'll have a surprise that day." Things like that.
> GB: How long did it take you to do that?
> TN: Right away. As soon as I got inside. I knew that I was going to get time, that's when I started pushing everybody away and cutting off with everybody. [TN 11/97]

The impact of this emotional isolation can be quite devastating. In order to mentally adjust to and survive this situation, an inmate must concentrate on reading the spatial text of prison. That is, he must abide by the submerged code that dictates social interaction in the prison context. In the above case of the resident he became involved in the risky practice of making "moonshine" in the institutional kitchen, selling his brew to fellow inmates. Eventually, he was caught by institutional staff and spent time in a segregated isolation unit. Later, he started an illegal sports betting and gambling racket. He used the money he made from these projects to buy himself clothing and whatever amenities he needed while behind bars. As much as he hated prison and wanted out of the system, "doing his time" and the relative personal success he enjoyed in this environment became a source of pride. This hardened attitude seemed to carry over into the House and affected his relationships with other residents. He found that some residents' stories of being separated from family and complaints about the system of incarceration to be a "bore".

> TN: Well, if a guy - this is the same guy - if he talks one day about his girlfriend wants to dump him and he cries about it. And the next day he couldn't get a weekend pass he cries about it in group. And then the next day he doesn't like the system - the correctional system, the federal system, or the provincial correctional services. Like, these things bore me.
> GB: He doesn't accept the consequences of what he's done? He complains about it?
> TN: Yeah. That's what I told him, "Why don't you stop complaining? Why don't you just do your time? You're the one that got yourself in this system. You're not going to be in this system the rest of your life. Just because you're not happy they're not going change the whole system.. You're not just the only guy here who's a federal. There's a lot of guys around here that don't complain." Things like this. But I try to like put some sense into him, "You're not a baby. You're a big boy. You're the one that got yourself into this shit."
> [TN 11/97]

"Doing one's time" is a metaphor for accepting the consequences of one's actions and finding ways of dealing with the monotony of incarceration. It also stands for a liminal state outside of a normative social existence – away from family, friends, a home, a job – in short, the world outside the prison. In many ways, this resident seems to completely miss the point of psychotherapeutic interventions. Group psychotherapy is a bore and one should simply "do his time". For some inmates, as another resident from a federal institution related, prison and "doing one's time" can become a normative existence. When he began to experience his incarceration as being "normal" he began to worry that he may spend the rest of his life behind bars.

> MM: Not pride. It's just that I can do my time. It's no longer a fear no more. I could wake up tomorrow and they could say, "You have to go back." I'll go back. In that case, I don't fear it. After that experience, I don't fear nothing 'cause I think that was the worst that could happen. Like it's sad some people take it to heart and keep on doing it and doing it - never seem to learn. That's what it does to you - you don't fear it no more. There's nothing left to fear in the world - nothing. They [prison staff] tell you to do this and do that. And I used to hate it but after awhile it didn't bother me no more. It was like an outside world - I'm going to camp; I'm going to work. Just following that routine. In a way this place was like - it's home now; it's getting kind of homey.
> GB: You were getting comfortable?
> MM: Yeah. Right. It was strange how it happened. Before I came inside [prison] I worked. I got up every morning and went to work. And all of a sudden here I am - back in the joint, getting up, having my coffee, going to work, do my eight hour shift; that's it right; go home have supper. But it was strange how it contradicted the mind. Where [prison] was reality; this was it. This is your choice now. If you want to live it the rest of your life or only a few more years or only a few more months. That was a hard choice. {MM 22/10/97}

This resident speaks of becoming familiar with the text of prison space to the extent that the prison 'script' became progressively easier for him to read and to follow. "Doing his time" became a set of familiar and routine discursive practices to which he subscribed. Like the other residents, prison and its economy of discourses became a source of personal identity. According to him, shedding the identity of a prisoner was a "hard choice".

Based on my observations and interviews, the experience of incarceration seems to vary among residents depending on whether they served a sentence in a federal or a provincial institution. One obvious reason for this is that residents from provincial institutions have been incarcerated for a briefer period of time whereas residents from federal institutions have served sentences of not less than two years. According to my conversations with residents from

federal institutions, their experiences of being incarcerated did appear to be more impacting. That is, these experiences had become a strong source of personal identity. Specifically, these residents appeared to be more conscious of obeying "the con code" – a code of ethics among incarcerated populations. In contrast, the residents from provincial institutions I interviewed tended to observe that residents from federal institutions had an attitude of being "tough guys". One Inuk resident [LB 30/10/97] suggested this was probably because those from federal institutions had normally witnessed more violence while in prison. Finally, residents from federal institutions had more experience in a number of different institutions. A Mohawk resident offered this reflection on his imprisonment:

> TM: A lot of things happen. There's a lot of fights, stabbings - stuff like that. You get locked in your cell all day; it drives you nuts; it's like putting a dog in a cage and leaving him there.
> GB: How many hours a day would you spend in your cell?
> TM: When I was at [maximum security] I was spending 22 hours a day in my cell over there. When I got to [medium security] they let us out at 7 o'clock in the morning then we have to be back in our cells at 9:30 till lunch time. Then after that you could go to work or go to school over there too. And in the afternoons it would be the same things. I think they lock the cells at one o'clock. And open them back up at 3:30. But after that - after 3:30 they're opened till 11 o'clock at night.
> GB: But you're always regulated by the locking of the doors?
> TM: Yeah, it's a lot different like from [maximum security] to [medium security]; it's just like you're walking from one world into another. And then from that world you get into [the House]; it's totally different.
> GB: What do you mean by worlds?
> TM: Like you notice the freedom. After you've been locked in your cell so long you notice - like you get to [medium security] and you say, "Alright, I'm free now!" It's like you're free again.
> GB: But you're still in prison?
> TM: Yeah, you're still in prison but you're not in your cell as much. And then you get over [to the House] and you're really free. [TM 10/18/97]

According to this resident his sense of freedom was relative to a series of institutional spaces, each of which tightly constrained his movement. Within the system of incarceration there exist gradations to one's practice of freedom. For the resident the House represented an extension of the system of incarceration that provided the greatest amount of freedom. I observed that residents from provincial institutions could not relate as much detail about their incarcerated experiences as residents from federal institutions. Whether residents' differing experiences of incarceration influence the effects of therapy was not clear to me, and clinical staff could not and

seemed reluctant to offer any evidence based on their own observations.[49] Finally, I should add – and this is important – that residents from federal institutions tended to underline their sense of "hard-time" distinctiveness from other residents.

> Actually, I feel more comfortable with other federal guys 'cause they know more about the system. Like they do respect more - they have respect towards you and you got to have respect towards them. 'Cause like the provincial guys it's not the same or they don't care.
> [TN 11/97]

Residents from federal institutions do care about their incarcerated biographies and the perceived status it brings them within the House. The issues of diversity and constructing senses of distinctiveness are important for all residents. The counselling staff is willing to recognize some sources of difference among residents, such as culture and language. But they will not tolerate a sense of distinctiveness founded on criminal activity or the biography of one's imprisonment.

Not surprisingly, all of the residents I came to know at the House, whether from federal or provincial institutions, detested being locked up in prison. The House was a much welcome relief from the monotony of being behind bars. The issue, then, becomes how residents make use of their time at the House, which is linked to how residents interpret the space of the House. For some of the residents, especially two of the federal residents cited above, the House seemed to be little more than yet another institutional stop in their incarcerated biographies – a physical space to "do their time". This is in direct contrast to the residents Jack and Samson discussed in Chapter Three, who saw the House as a venue for personal change and spiritual renewal. By exploring two vignettes taken from my fieldwork experiences we can see how the text of the House is read by residents. The House is read through the repeated actions of both residents and staff and determines how they interact with its discursive practices.

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[49] As much as the staff detested the practice, residents did hold certain ideas that a resident from a federal institution was doing time for a "more serious" offence. Staff detested this practice because it created a hierarchy of offences among residents that referred more to the system of incarceration than to the mission of the House. Further, this practice undermined one of the principal goals of therapy which was to level the identities of residents to one where all were equally in need of healing.

**My First "Group"**

When I began my fieldwork, the first group psychotherapy session I sat through was an emergency dialogue "Circle". The purpose of this session was to talk about the suspected presence of narcotics in the House. As I had not sat in on "group" before, I could not attest to anything unusual about it; group was a completely new experience for me. But as I would later learn this one session was unusual insofar as the executive director of Nechi House was leading the group, something that rarely occurs. He was there principally to deliver threats and ultimatums to those residents who were bringing in and using drugs in the House. He told the residents that he would "lock down" the House and keep them in for the entire summer. As he was the executive director and all the residents were in the legal custody[50] of the House he did have the power carry out this threat. This warning also extended to the intensive therapy camp that was coming up later in the summer. Most residents were looking forward to this excursion out of the city. He then proceeded to ask residents one by one what they thought about the fact that some residents would put their own need for drugs ahead of everyone else's needs. Not surprisingly, all residents who spoke expressed their frustration and irritation at the "unfairness" of this behaviour by fellow residents. After the group had gone about halfway around the "Circle" – and had clearly yielded no new information – one of the residents, Marc, from a federal institution, began confronting and even pointing out those residents he knew or strongly suspected of using drugs. The accused residents vehemently denied his allegations. A few of the accused residents had just moments before convincingly testified that they were not responsible for the drug problem. Eventually, other residents joined in on the attack on these defensive residents who were overwhelmed by the assault from the group. Soon the accused residents confessed. A series of moving and powerful personal disclosures followed.

One of the first accused residents to speak was Gerald, a resident from a northern community. First, he told the group how threatened he felt by the accusations, and that he was

[50] The clinical team of the House preferred to use the term "care" versus "custody" when referring to a resident's legal status at the House. Technically and legally, the House had custody over its residents. However, custody implies that the House is more like an incarcerating institution rather than a healing / therapeutic community.

tempted to resort to violence. He even warned those present that he could find any object in the room and turn it into a weapon. After he calmed down, he rationalized his drug use by saying he was lonely for his family, whom he had not seen in many months. Drugs took away the emotional pain of missing them. He rhetorically asked the group, "You think you are feeling bad, how would you feel if you were me and the only connection you had to your family was a telephone?" After he said this several other residents disclosed their use of or trafficking in drugs and the pain they were also feeling.

Marc, the resident who pointed out the other residents responsible for the drugs in the House, became very apprehensive when he pointed out Mitchell, who had recently arrived from a federal institution. He told Mitchell that he was not afraid of him "even if he was a murderer". However, his body language betrayed his fear – he climbed into the corner of the couch and held himself in a fetal position.

When confronted, Mitchell maintained his composure and readily admitted to trafficking in drugs and occasionally using them. But he claimed that he gave his drugs to a resident who recently went A.W.O.L. from the House. He said he was surprised by how easy it was to confess to the group. He then re-assured Marc that he should have no reason to be frightened of him since he had been under the influence of alcohol when he committed his crimes.

Mitchell then began relating the nature of his crimes. He had served two separate sentences for manslaughter. He recalled that during both violent assaults he was fully aware of what he was doing and knew that his actions during the altercations could lead to the deaths of the people he was fighting with. He reported that he felt very bad about causing the deaths of these two individuals and frequently thought about what it did to the deceased men's families. Mitchell then wondered out loud if he had an "anger problem" and may need to do something like "anger management". As well, he said he felt that he might be "regressing" and that he needed an "addiction plan".[51] According to him, trafficking in drugs provided a way for him

[51] I suspected at this point that Mitchell had been through a series of psychotherapeutic programs while incarcerated in federal prison. In later group psychotherapy sessions I noted that he occasionally resorted to

to make ends meet while incarcerated. He used the money to support his own drug habit and to buy the things he needed to deal with the monotony of incarceration. He said going back to jail was easy for him: "like crawling back into a hole as long as he had a TV and a way of passing the boredom." Ironically, he remarked that the next time he got out of prison he would have his property insured so he could hang on to it better. Crime, based on his experiences, was cyclical. He stole from other thieves, fenced what he stole, and used the money to buy his own things. Someone in turn would steal from him and the cycle would be repeated. On one occasion, however, he caught the person who was stealing from him and subsequently beat him to death.

One Inuk resident caved into the emotional heaviness of the group. He told the group about his ambivalent feeling towards his father. He said he loved his late father dearly and missed him. However, he remembered the way his father treated his sister when he was a child. At the moment he was about to disclose what his father did to his sister, he paused and repeated several times, "My father, my king" thereby raising the stature of his father before the group. Then he told the group about a memory that he had when he was about ten years old. He watched his father beat his older sister. Blood was pouring out of her mouth. Through an open bedroom door he watched his father mount his sister and sexually gratify himself. The images of this incident sickened him and for most of his life he struggled with intense feelings of ambivalence and shame.

An Algonquin resident related a similar traumatic story to the group. He was about twelve years old at the time. He recalled standing on the porch of his house with a baseball bat. His mother was inside the house being sexually assaulted. When he thinks of the memory all he can see is a little boy standing on the porch holding on to a baseball bat. He was too frightened to stop the attack and stood there listening to his mother's screams.

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psychological terminology when discussing his personal problems. I felt that he must have learned this jargon from psychotherapists working in the correctional system. At the time of his residence Mitchell had spent about fifteen years in federal institutions. After completing my fieldwork, I learned that he voluntarily went back to a federal institution.

The session lasted for at least three hours. A number of other residents also made disclosures. In retrospect, within my entire summer of group this first session was quite powerful and remarkable.

In the fall, at least four months after this group I asked a few residents about it. Some of these residents did recall it or were familiar with some of the events that transpired afterwards. In particular, I was interested in Marc, the resident who had openly accused the other residents. He reported to me that Gerald, the resident who felt threatened by the group, caused a lot of problems in the House. The problems stemmed from the fact that Marc disclosed information about the other residents in group. Apparently, Gerald told his drug supplier on the outside of the House that Marc "ratted" on several of the residents and he should suffer the consequences. This drug supplier began confronting Marc on the street and accused him of being a "rat". According to Marc, the staff of the House became very alarmed and were concerned for his safety. Consequently, Gerald was immediately sent back to prison for threatening violence against a fellow resident. Marc discussed the problems this situation created.

> GB: Did the staff know how to deal with it?
> MM: No, I don t think so.
> GB: It was a prison problem that [came into the House] ?
> MM: Yeah, sort of. Like, they were asking, "So are you worried or paranoid. . .? Do you want to go outside?" "If they're going to confront me, let them confront me." [I told them]. "Like, they already did and the next time". I pretty well told the guy [the drug pusher], "There's no point." He might be big but he was a big time piece of shit. And so I tried to avoid him on the street. And he would see me on the street and he would be yelling. And I would confront him, right. And tell him to shut the hell up and that, "This is none of your business." And me, I was stuck in the middle. And it just blew over. There was no repercussions. I'm not worried about it. Whatever somebody said, they said. They were trying to deny it and this and that and they think I'm trying to deny it. That's what the prison life will do. It could be dangerous, if you couldn't beat it. So other confrontations, I think was the last. [MM 22/10/97]

Marc felt that he handled the situation very well on his own. He also believed that there was little the staff could do little to alleviate the situation beyond what they had already done. He felt strongly that he was able to negotiate the situation because he had very similar experiences while incarcerated in a federal institution. According to him, accusations and potentially violent conflicts arise on a frequent basis in federal institutions; thus, you learn to be careful and you

learn quickly. In order to "beat" this situation, he told me, he resorted to tactics he learned while incarcerated, i.e. aggressive diplomacy, avoidance, threats, "staring down", yelling, and, if necessary, physical force.

There is an interesting spatial antagonism reflected in the above quote. Marc implies that the House is a specific type of space that is not prison, and where one should not be subject to the prison code of ethics. Therefore, he did not "rat" on his fellow inmates. Yet, the conflicts that took place between himself and the drug pusher took place on the street – beyond the bounds of the spatial domain of the House. Importantly, he reports he was "stuck in the middle" of a conflict of interpretation over the meaning of the space of the House. Further, he was literally stuck in a liminal space between the House and the street; his personal safety was genuinely at risk. His response to the drug pusher was that what goes on in the House was "none of his business". In other words, the customary discursive practices of criminal behaviour had no place in the House. But in this instance those discursive practices of the prison setting invaded the space of the House; in fact, the conflict originated in a group session when Gerald felt that a central tenet of the code of ethics among prisoners still applied – one does not "rat" on others. Accordingly, he sought out the appropriate means of punishment in an incarcerated setting: violent retribution. The conflict subsided with Marc and the drug pusher yelling at each other on the street, a kind of discursive no-man's land. Finally, Marc admitted he ultimately resorted to the practices he learned in prison, itself a spatial text.

The central conflict of interpretation in this vignette is that of "disclosure" versus that of "ratting", both of which have metaphorical meanings. On the one hand, Marc was acting as a community member by confronting his fellow residents. In a sense, he may have been coming to their aid and acting on the principles of sharing, caring, honesty and respect. "Disclosure" implies a revelation or the act of "the truth" being revealed. In this sense, "disclosure" is linked to maintaining the spiritual integrity of the "Circle" and supporting the "Nechi Community". On the other hand, from the perspective of those who were confronted, Marc was being a "rat". He had his own personal and selfish motivations for betraying them

to the authority of the House. Thus, "ratting" implies an invasion of one's limited personal space by a filthy rodent. This act of betrayal upsets the internal emotional closure one must maintain to "do one's time". The spatial meanings of the House can be seen here as follows: in the first instance, the House is a therapeutic community where residents come to the support of each other and try to help each other overcome their personal struggles. In the other, the House is merely an extension of the prison system; one respects the privacy of others and their ways of coping in an emotionally deprived setting, even when those methods of coping, i.e. drug use, make the experience of incarceration more difficult.

At the moment when the above incident of disclosing / ratting took place, the House was in a turbulent state of flux; it momentarily vacillated between healing and disciplining poles. As well, it must be kept in mind that the executive director, (whose office resides within the House's administration area and who, arguably, embodies its authoritarian character) who rarely leads the "group", was threatening the residents with punishment. Further, residents were sharply reminded that they were in the House's custody – that they were involuntary clients and had no other choice but to obey. Still, for some residents, the ethics of imprisonment eclipsed their way of thinking and interacting with others while at the House. Even if they successfully return to their communities and their families, some of these residents will undoubtedly continue to live within the shadows of incarceration. Consequently, they strongly believe a "reputation" for being a "rat" will follow them everywhere and for many years to come.

> GB: So that meeting we had - in that community circle and one of the residents went and pointed out the other guys that were using [drugs] – [in prison] he probably would have been dead.
> TM: Yeah, for sure.
> GB: It's that dangerous - that sort of thinking? Why do you think it's different - the thinking from the pen to here?
> TM: I don't know why they think like that, 'cause they could end up back in the same place in the pen and they'll go back with that reputation - if they tell - because that will follow them everywhere. I don't understand why they're thinking like that. Like, you have to be careful all the time. You can't let your guard down.
> GB: So for you [not disclosing is] sort of like an insurance policy?
> TM: Yeah, just in case. I don't know what's going to happen. I don't know what I'm going to do when I get home. Something could, some freak accident could happen and I'll end up back in the pen. And I don't need something like that [being accused of being a "rat"] following me there. As much as I hate the drugs and everything too, I'm not going to go and tell on somebody about it. [TM 18/10/97]

Many residents, like the one quoted above, are very pessimistic about their futures. The prospect of being sent back to prison at some point in the near future is a very hard reality to face. Consequently, they maintain a guardedness that in all likelihood contributes to the probability of returning to prison and is central to their resistance to therapy. That is, they resist the care and support of the clinical staff and are deeply suspicious of the altruistic motivations of "professional caregivers"; these residents will maintain their isolation and will likely remain troubled about their pasts. Disclosure implies emotional vulnerability; in a penal setting that is too great a personal risk. Life behind bars has taught them to protect themselves through emotionally distancing themselves from other inmates. Therefore, these residents maintain a prison identity and are faithful to the ethics of imprisonment; mentally, they have not really left the experience of incarceration behind them. This state of mind influences their reading of the House and cultivates an interpretation of its space and its practices that make it feel like an extension of the incarcerating system, except that one enjoys a greater level of "freedom" in comparison to prison. The result of all this is that these residents begin to interact with the House as if it were a prison space – experiencing it as monotonous and having to resort to practices of deception.

In conclusion, depending on residents' subjective experiences of the House, as a spatial text it can be interpreted in differing ways. As such, the text of the House refers to the world beyond itself. For some, 'disclosing' serves to carry the House, and the narrated self constructed within it, towards a path of healing. For others, ratting (as opposed to disclosure) serves to maintain the status quo, thereby keeping the House and the imprisoned self within the institutional boundaries of corrections.

**The "Little People"**

About three weeks into my fieldwork I sat through a Wednesday morning Nechi Community Circle. I had become accustomed to group by this time. On this particular day it began in the usual way. Each NCC began with a lot of small talk, usually not very intense;

generally the dialogue seemed to flit about the room. Eventually, a counsellor would take hold of the group and begin the discussion for the morning. This particular group was no different, except in terms of the delightfulness of the topic: mystical visitors known as the "Little People".

In my own Saulteaux community and from what I have heard from family, extended family and acquaintances about other Native communities in Canada, there is a widespread cultural mythology surrounding a belief in an alternative world of miniature humans. However, I have encountered few if any mentions about the "Little People" in the relevant North American ethnographic literature. I did learn from Dr. Ian Dyck, an archaeologist at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, Quebec that in the Plains Cree communities he worked in throughout his career, stories about the "Little People" are sometimes associated with certain archaeological sites (personal communication, spring 1994). However, he could not provide any greater elaboration. In my own family, stories of the "Little People" are associated with individuals who seem to be spiritually gifted. That is, if a person encounters the "Little People", that person is considered to be endowed with special powers, i.e. good fortune, insight and so on. Stories of encounters with the "Little People" are not located in the distant past. In fact, they exist in present day discourse and specific living people are mentioned as having had contact with the "Little People". Cross-culturally, a belief in the "Little People" could be likened to European folklore about elves, goblins, gnomes, fairies or even Irish leprechauns.

In this particular group the head counsellor suggested that at the upcoming camp we could expect to have encounters with these small visitors. In the past, there had been reports of unexplained "mischief" at the camp. The effect on the residents of the counsellor's opening was stunning. Most of the residents were eager to relate stories about things that they had heard about or even experienced personally. One Inuk resident, Simon, who usually said very little, shared an experience of when he had been hunting in an unfamiliar location. He told the group that one time he and his hunting partner came across a small village of stone igloos. He said the igloos were perfectly formed, just very small. However, the village looked as if it had

been abandoned a long time ago and seemed ancient. Upon returning to his community he told some older people about what he and his partner encountered. These elders verified the find, saying it was the place of the "Little People". Also, they were advised not to disturb it since there had been stories about this place and that it should be respected.

Another resident, a Mohawk, told a story about a man in his community who had an encounter with the "Little People". According to what he was told, the man was walking from his community along a trail to another town (this event took place when there were few cars and roads in the community). Though the trail was familiar to him, he somehow became lost. He came across a family of the "Little People" who were roasting a bird to feed their baby. The man sat and ate with this family. During the feast he had a conversation with the "Little People" and they told him how to find his way home. Apparently the man has lived a very fortunate life. Some people in the community attribute his good fortune to his encounter with the "Little People". Another Mohawk resident reported that his own son encountered the "Little People" and they told him their names. The names were all in the Mohawk language, Kanienkehaka. His son told him the names. He believes his son was telling the truth since he does not speak the language yet was able to pronounce the names and could not have made them up. A resident from a northern locale told a story of a man in his community who lived a long time ago and was said to have had an encounter with the "Little People". He was given hunting magic and was a successful hunter.

Over the course of the morning the group continued its very affable discussion. Some resident began sharing humorous hunting stories. One Algonquin resident told a story about a large brown bear that he saw scratching its back against a dead tree on the side of a hill. The weight of the bear caused the tree to snap. The bear rolled down the hill and ended up in the lake. Another resident reported becoming very frightened one time while hunting in the woods. He was walking back to his camp and could hear something following him. Every time he turned to look back the noise would stop. When he finally got back to camp feeling very

nervous, he discovered the noise had been caused by a baby porcupine that had become lost and begun following him.

The dialogue of the group remained upbeat and playful. Some residents told scarier stories but there were no interpersonal conflicts. And almost every single group I attended before and after this session involved some interpersonal conflict. Generally, I found the discussion to be very "cultural" and most residents seemed to enjoy the discussion.

During NCC members of the staff and residents will occasionally leave the room. As the sessions often last for at least two hours – and it is not uncommon that they can last up to three or four hours, depending on the intensity – people may need to go to the bathroom or want to fill up their cups with more coffee. I did not notice anything unusual that morning in terms of residents entering or leaving the room. Since I was doing fieldwork I made a conscious effort to stay in group and remain focused on the dialogue. This particular day group ended at lunch, after about two to two and a half-hours of discussion.

After this particular group session ended I was completely caught off guard by what I saw next. Upon leaving the living room where group took place I saw posted on the doors of residents' rooms notices on white paper. The notices indicated to the resident of the room that administration staff had searched his room and property. Importantly, not every room had been searched; specific residents were singled out. The notices – and their glaring public presence – seemed to have had a strong effect on all of the residents. The group which just moments before were reveling in each other's cultural stories grew very silent. Particularly, the residents whose rooms had been searched appeared very sullen; not unexpectedly, some were visibly angry and became belligerent towards staff. I made my way up the corridor and went to see the executive director. On his desk was an assortment of items found in some of the searched rooms: plastic bags and tinfoil stained with cannabis resin, small quantities of hashish, and even a hash pipe carved from soap stone. Within a few days or a week, a couple of residents were sent back to prison. In discussing the events of that morning with the head counsellor who opened the group I learned that she noticed something that I had not. The residents whose

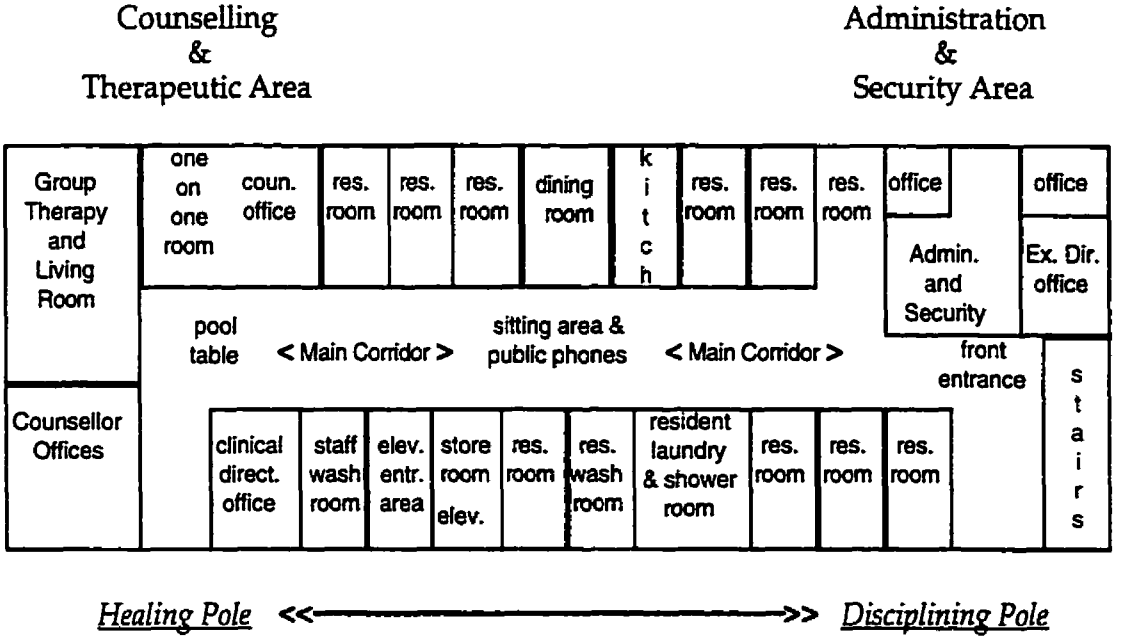
rooms were being searched during the group left the living room through the course of the morning. According to the counsellor, it seemed that these residents were able to communicate with one another during the group – in spite of the enthusiasm of the dialogue – that the administration staff were conducting room searches. To understand the importance of this group session followed by the search one has to understand the spatial distribution of the House.

**The Space of the House**

The room in Nechi House where the group therapy takes place is at the end of a long corridor that runs down the length of the House. This room also acts as the living room where the television is located and some exercise equipment is kept. Since it is open and spacious, it is the main socializing room for residents and staff. At the opposite end of this corridor are the administration offices. The administration area is nearly the same size as the living room but is divided into a number offices with permanent walls, and can feel cramped within. Only the staff is allowed access to the administration area; it is completely off-limits to residents unless they are going through an in-take process when they first arrive at the House or have been invited by staff to sit in this area. The counsellors' offices, and the "one-on-one" room where individual counselling takes place, are concentrated around the living room area. For security reasons, counsellors' offices are also closed to residents. Along the length of the corridor are the resident's rooms. Mid-way along the corridor are the kitchen and dining rooms. On the opposite side are the bathroom and laundry rooms. Two public pay phones are located here. These spaces are the public spaces of the House. They are accessible to all members of the House. Beyond this area there are more resident rooms, then the administration area. The main entrance is adjacent to the administration area. Residents must check in and out with the security personnel when entering or leaving the House and have to use four flights of stairs. Staff, on the other hand, usually use the elevator, which is located in a room that can only be accessed with a security card that staff carry with them at all times. The staff washrooms are

located in this area as well. This room with the elevator and staff bathrooms is situated about midway along the corridor.

**Figure 2. Map of the House**




The physical placement of the administration offices and therapeutic areas at opposite ends of the House was not, as far as I know, a deliberate choice. However, it does, in my view, literally reflect the vacillation of the House's practices between "healing" and "disciplining" poles. The decision to conduct room searches and the execution of this decision originates from the administration area; this is where the administrative and clinical staff usually meet. Further, the rooms of residents are accessible to staff, whereas staff rooms, for reasons cited above, are never accessible to residents. Residents' access to spaces in the House is limited, whereas staff access is generally unlimited. Obviously, within the "community" of the House there exist asymmetrical relations of power, and this power is practiced through access to private space; it is always clear to residents and staff who exercises supreme authority over the space of the House. During moments when the House wavers between authoritarian and caregiving

practices the counselling rhetoric of "Circle" and "Community" may come across as ambiguous, if not altogether meaningless, to some residents.

When I was employed with the House I participated in a general search of the rooms of residents. Only the administrative staff were asked to take part in the search. Based on my experience and limited knowledge, counselling staff do not conduct the actual searches. They are, however, a critical part of the decision process, likely because in comparison to the non-clinical staff they are the ones most aware of what is going on with the residents. However, the location of their offices and where their clinical work with residents always goes on is at the opposite end of the corridor. On the occasion when I participated in a general search, all residents and clinical staff were concentrated at the "therapeutic" end of the House. There was a noticeable solidarity of resistance among residents as administration staff 'swept' the House; we did find a number of clues that drugs were present in the House. For clinical staff to openly take part in room searches would likely damage their credibility as caregivers in the eyes of residents.

The group session discussed above reflects starkly the ambiguity of the House's mission and the difficulty of the position in which clinical staff frequently find themselves. Clinical staff do genuinely want to support the residents who come to the House for therapy. Yet, drugs and criminal activity are a fact of life in the House; and this fact must be immediately confronted. The captivating group session seemed to have a very positive effect on all of the residents. But what immediately followed the group – the evidence of selective room searches – appeared to completely devastate the positive effects of that session for most residents. Regardless, the message was universal: the House exercises absolute power over all of its spaces. It was a reminder to clinical staff and residents – the permanent and temporary members of the Nechi Community – that the House was still operating within the strict and unpleasant disciplinarian confines of corrections. And, unfortunately, the searches did bear fruit; in fact, they always do.

The spatial text of the House is open to interpretation. As I discussed regarding Moore's view of how space may be read, her argument is that repeated actions serve to enact or unfold the symbolic meanings of space. However, when the symbolic meanings of space are invoked, they are open to subjective interpretation. My argument here is that searches are among those repeated actions which take place in the House to "activate" certain kinds of symbolic associations within its bounded space, and the divisions therein. Specifically, the rooms of the residents are supposed to be their private space. The residents have keys to their doors. Clinical staff even informed me that newly arrived residents will sometimes refer to their rooms as "cells" and sometimes ask what time "lock down" occurs. Eventually, these new residents adjust to the space of the House and the freedom it offers. Their private space is no longer a cell but a room and the House no longer a prison but a temporary "home". One's room, however, can serve as a venue of resistance to healing. The repeated action of staffs' room searches changes the meaning of the space. The residents' rooms, representing "privacy", "home", even "independence", revert back to cells, the House back to an institution, and residents back to inmates.

Narcotics in the House have competing metaphorical connotations. For members of the community who subscribe to the discourse of Aboriginality and healing, narcotics are metaphors of pollution and violation. They are a form of spiritual pollution that offends "the Medicines". Drugs are also a violation of the House's therapeutic integrity which damages the clinical efforts of staff. As a whole narcotics jeopardize and undermine the Nechi community. For residents who subscribe to the discourses of criminal identity, narcotics are a form of resistance to "The System". Trafficking narcotics is being sneaky; it is a thrill to "play the game" of crime. Finally, using narcotics is a fleeting escape from the monotony of "doing one's time" and the personal misery of this lifestyle.

The clinical staff of the House is forced to negotiate these conflicting interpretations among residents over the meaning of its space. They do so through the therapeutic rhetoric of "Community" and the "Circle". Residents are forced to make a choice between the discursive

sources of their personal identity. Those discursive sources reside within the respective spatial texts of prisons and the House. On the one hand, the discourses of criminality are located within the correctional system. Consequently, the House may be seen and experienced as a part of or an extension of the spaces which represent that system. On the other hand, the House can be a distinct spatial rupture – but in a positive sense – for some residents. That is, the House is a space for personal healing and spiritual renewal; it can become a surrogate "aboriginal" community for those residents who subscribe to the discourse of Aboriginality and the rhetoric of healing.

**Narrated Self and Discursive / Spatial Context**

In the Introduction I discussed the issue of the contextuality of meaning drawn from narrative constructions of social reality. As Edward Bruner demonstrated, stories are always subject to change and vary according to audience, political and social conditions, and the intentions of the narrator. In short, the (discursive) context in which a story unfolds determines its meaning. From this point of view, it follows that if meaning is contextual then a narrated self is likely to be a transitory form of identity. Among residents, then, it is probable that the personal meanings they draw from their narratives of self developed while residing within the discursive and spatial context of the House may be limited to that socializing milieu. Furthermore, to sustain that narrated self and the personal meanings drawn from it, the resident must search for similar discursive and spatial social milieus which carry this contextual and transitory identity forward in time.

The issue of contextual meaning, a narrated self and transitory identity is a suggestion, I acknowledge, that I cannot fully substantiate here due to limitations in my fieldwork (my fieldwork was mostly constrained to the House). But my observations of some residents and from what others discussed in our interviews demonstrated to me that their senses of self were very much dependent upon and linked to discursive and spatial contexts. Several residents did strongly believe that they (sometimes radically) changed their identities depending upon

whether they were at home in their communities, amongst family or friends (even depending upon a family member's or friend's gender), in prison, on the street, or in the House. Identity as formed through personal narratives and constrained and influenced by discursive practices within a given spatial text presents a self that has a kind of chameleon quality that adapts to and changes with the social setting (Kerby 1991).

During my fieldwork I experienced an event which forced me to consider this issue of the contextually dependent nature of a narrated self as a transitory identity. I later debated this matter with two House counsellors, both of whom strongly resisted my point of view.[52] In the last three weeks of my fieldwork, Jean-Marc, a resident from a federal institution, was sent back to prison for his continued use of narcotics while at the House. He had come to the House with a history of chronic drug use. Yet, while he was at the House he seemed to demonstrate to counselling staff that he had a genuine desire to come to terms with his addiction, had made progress in the therapeutic program, and wanted out of the system of incarceration. Eventually, he was returned to the House. On the day of his return to the House a close family member died under tragic circumstances. The counselling staff decided to let him travel to his community so that he could attend the funeral. I volunteered to escort Jean-Marc.[53]

Something that struck me about our visit to Jean-Marc's community was his interaction with his family, his friends, and other community members. In the few days that I spent with him in his community and among his family and friends I understood that Jean-Marc had a place, a role and a set of experiences in his community and beyond it. As well, he had a designated place in his family that he had been removed from since he had been incarcerated. One day, if he survived his incarceration and escaped its cycle, he might return to resume his

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[52] This resistance among the counsellors can be seen in the Introduction where one of the counsellors declared, "... that would have you believe there is some magical quality about the House, and I don't believe that. We don't cast a spell over them." Instead, these counsellors held a view of their clients, as I have argued throughout this thesis that essentialized and romanticized their cultural identity as "aboriginals". The "aboriginal" in these men was portrayed by counsellors as some intrinsic element to their being that had to be brought forth.

[53] Jean Marc required an escort since he was a federal inmate in the House's custody. From what I understood at the time, the House was required by corrections to escort federal inmates if they were traveling more than twenty-five kilometres beyond the radius of the House. As Jean-Marc was under strict parole requirements an escort was mandatory.

place there. In other words, in spite of his forced and prolonged absence, he still enjoyed a continuity in the life of his community and in the lives of his family and friends. In short, he had a specific personal history that was entangled with and intrinsic to the personal histories of others .

I have two memories of this experience which stick out in my mind. The first one I recall was while standing on the side of a road with Jean-Marc and his female cousin. As we stood there talking a community police cruiser drove past. His cousin jokingly remarked to Jean-Marc, "Heh, there goes your taxi." Jean-Marc thought it was quite funny and took it in good stride. The joke was in reference to his cousin's observation that in their community Jean-Marc was a chronic law breaker and was frequently being picked up by the police. Hence, the police car was more like a taxi when it came to her incarcerated cousin. My point here is that in his community Jean-Marc had a collectively recognized identity as being a criminal – a social deviant – that was founded on a set of past experiences. Likely, while he was in his community it was difficult for him to escape this identity.

In addition, Jean-Marc, like many prisoners who have been incarcerated in federal institutions, had a well-muscled physique and many tattoos. Lifting weights and tattooing one's body while incarcerated is part of the culture of imprisonment. Jean-Marc was clearly very proud of his body's appearance. He enjoyed walking about the community without a shirt on. On at least three occasions, I recall Jean-Marc recounting his prison experiences to people he was acquainted with; some of these acquaintances had also been incarcerated. I would listen to him systematically list the various federal institutions where he had done time, and emphasizing the security level of each one: minimum, medium or maximum. Occasionally, he would point to his tattoos and indicate which institution he had been at when he had the tattoo done. It was clear to me that his biography of imprisonment mattered a great deal to him and was an obvious source of personal pride. The tattoos were handily used as points of reference for his story telling.

The point here is that it would be highly unlikely that Jean-Marc would ever walk around the spaces of Nechi House without a shirt on and proudly narrate his prison experiences, especially if his audience was a counsellor or other residents in a group session. For Jean-Marc imprisonment became more than a set of internalized experiences; he inscribed its corresponding discourses onto his body (in fact, almost literally, the tattoos etched on his body traced a kind of symbolic biography of his trajectory from prison to prison). Most importantly, once he left the therapeutic context of the House and was immersed back into a context that had probably contributed to his prior socialization as an outlaw / prisoner, he chose to narrate the "hard time" he did in various prisons. It appeared to me that Jean-Marc constructed an entirely different set of personal meanings from his incarcerated experiences that, undoubtedly, contradicted what he may have constructed over the course of therapy in the presence of counsellors and the group.

Alternatively, based on what I had been told by counsellors, as well as by some of the residents I interviewed, among some residents there was a movement in the opposite direction ( as compared to Jean-Marc's behaviour ). Some residents attempted to foster opportunities that would further the narrated self of recovery and renewal they developed at the House. For example, Jack, the resident discussed in Chapter Three, became very active at a local community organization that supports the needs of urban Native peoples. He and a group of peers formed a support group for Native people who had been adopted out of their communities. Similarly, Samson was preoccupied with cultivating a romantic relationship with a Native woman who was also going through her own healing journey. Staff also reported to me other instances of residents who successfully completed the House's therapeutic program and then later returned to their communities to develop awareness and support groups for people in crisis. These actions by individual residents serve to widen the therapeutic meaning and applications of the House's discourse of healing, moving it beyond the individual and into the global. The important point here is that these residents are trying to expand the discursive practices of the

House, possibly to ensure that their narrated self will carry forward in time and space on a journey of healing.

My observations demonstrated that the narrated self of some residents, whether on a path of healing or continued imprisonment, appears to be linked to context. My fieldwork experiences suggest that discourses and the spaces to which they are associated influence the configuration of personal narratives; thus, the meanings drawn from these narratives are dependent upon those contexts. Unfortunately, my fieldwork observations generally did not go beyond the setting of the House. As a result this conclusion must remain only speculative.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, I have discussed the meaning of space among residents as it pertains to their experiences at Nechi House and incarcerated settings. By looking at space as a kind of text, I have shown that it can be read and interpreted in a number of different ways. When space is viewed as text – and thus freed from its referential moorings – it is open to the widest number of readers. The space of the House is read through repeated actions (e.g. therapeutic practices, but also disciplinary ones such as searches) of the agents who occupy its space. Residents and staff must constantly negotiate alternative and conflicting interpretations of its spatial text, and attempt to clarify to themselves and for each other whether the House is a therapeutic community or an extension of the larger system of incarceration. Yet in the House's day-to-day practices, it is clear that there exist asymmetrical relations of power within the Nechi Community and this power is exercised through controlling, giving, invading, and withholding access to private and public space. Finally, I have suggested that the narrated self constructed in a specific discursive and spatial social milieu may be dependent upon that space to exist at all. In order to carry forward in time and space the resident must consciously advance into familiar social territories that will continue to nurture that sense of self. While this argument cannot be pursued further here, this issue is critical for the quest of successful therapeutic intervention. Otherwise, as I have shown in the case of Jean-Marc, the former narrated imprisoned self

appears to re-emerge once it leaves the socializing milieu of the House. Selfhood, as I have argued throughout this thesis, cannot be essentialized, nor is it something that is awakened and brought forth; rather it has external sources and is largely social in origin. The self as constructed through personal narratives is contextually linked to discursive practices located in the spatial texts of social settings.

# Conclusion

One of my primary intentions in this dissertation has been to provide some illumination through social theory on aspects of social experience – "reality" – as it pertains to Nechi House. In a larger concern I have demonstrated the constructed and negotiated nature of all social relations. Thus I have not argued that the sense of self developed by residents at the House is inauthentic. Instead I have tried to partially show how this authenticity is achieved. This authenticity of self, I have argued, is primarily attained through the meanings drawn from personal narratives filtered through discursive statements presented by clinical staff at the House. However, I suggest that because of their discursive sources and location within a problematic and symbolically complex socializing space that can be read as a kind of text, these meanings may be context-dependent. The narrated self of residents, then, may be specific to a discursive and spatial context and thus a highly transitory form of personal identity.

In particular, I have argued that the discourse of Aboriginality as a historical social construction and body of knowledge about cultural "Others" has become a broad tapestry into which residents can weave a narrated self. These acts of articulation, both to one's self and before a group of residents and staff lead, hopefully, to the gradual transformation in the meanings of personal narratives from ones initially concerned with pain and sadness to, ultimately, stories about healing and renewal. From this experience of sharing and listening to each other's stories, residents may learn to reflect upon and confront forms of behaviour and ingrained attitudes that possibly contribute to the cycles of alcoholism and substance abuse, criminal activity and periods of incarceration that have faced them throughout their adolescent and adult lives.

Clinical staff, I have shown, through their therapeutic ideology and practices, as well as their through own attitudes and personal commitments, tend to essentialize and romanticize the aboriginal identity of residents. In some important respects, I have demonstrated, they are forced to do so. For example, the Canadian State's own bureaucratic application of

Aboriginality does not fully differentiate the indigenous populations within its modern national territory; as a segment of the national population aboriginal peoples are mainly a legal (and statistical) category. Currently, men of aboriginal ancestry comprise an over-represented segment of the incarcerated Canadian population. Thus, on a daily basis the staff of Nechi House must confront a significant degree of cultural, geographic, and linguistic pluralism among residents that makes the delivery of effective and culturally sensitive (or relevant and specific) therapeutic interventions and programs difficult. As part of their therapeutic approach, the staff homogenize the cultural identities of residents and construct a sense of (aboriginal) community among residents. Residency at the House implies that one is and desires to act as a temporary member of the Nechi community. This surrogate aboriginal community is founded on the principles of caring, sharing, honesty and respect. In order to sustain this community, clinical staff deploy a series of rhetorical devices – "the Circle", "the Community", "the Medicines", "the Medicine Wheel", "the Sacred Fire" – to cultivate a moral imperative to the therapeutic interventions, as well as to invoke a common spiritual purpose among residents. But this moral imperative and sense of spiritual purpose appears to go beyond the professional goals and practices of some clinical staff, becoming highly personal in nature.

The issue of the space at Nechi House is fundamental to the construction and negotiation of meaning. When space is considered as text, containing both a sense with reference, action informed by meaning, the repeated actions of residents and staff create competing interpretations of the space. As I have shown, because of the presence of narcotics and the persistence of criminalized activities among some residents the House seems to periodically waver between a space for healing and a space for disciplining; it can be at once "the House" – an autonomous therapeutic community – and simultaneously, an extension of the system of incarceration – an institution. Consequently, the symbolic meanings of its spaces are open to interpretation.

The subjective experiences of residents influence their interpretations of what the House means and determine whether they will subscribe to or resist the clinical team's discourse of

healing. If a resident sees Nechi House as a space for healing, he will likely begin to construct personal narratives through those discursive statements presented by staff that are linked to a pan-Amerindian rhetoric which essentializes and romanticizes his aboriginal identity. However, even those residents who respond favourably to the clinical interventions of staff (as in the case described of two Inuit residents) seem to maintain a distance from some of the rhetoric which may appear foreign and incompatible with their own cultural backgrounds. On the other hand, when the space of the House is perceived to be too much like an extension of the system, some residents remain suspicious of the staff and their fellow residents. Consequently, these residents maintain a guardedness and will resist the healing discourse, withdrawing into an emotional and existential state of "doing one's time". Thus, the narrated self of these residents remains imprisoned within the correctional system. Finally, I suggested through my discussion of the resident Jean-Marc, that a narrated self founded on contextual meanings may be transitory, adapting and changing to discursive and spatial venues.

In sum, I am suggesting that selfhood among residents at Nechi House is deeply entrenched in language and largely social in origin. But I am resistant to the form of self that appears to be advocated by some of the clinical staff, one which tends to essentialize the aboriginal identity of residents. This vision of self appears to fix the meanings that comprise it, thus rendering selfhood as a rigid and static product as opposed to an imaginative and reflective process. Possibly, the fluid and narrated selfhood I argue that exists among residents represents a kind of (collective as well as personal) strategy of survival; this narrated and social self generates meaning that allows it to adapt and change according to the context in which it is existing.

Katherine Ewing (1990) offers a similar argument that is useful to my own observations. She suggests that the struggle many anthropologists experience in reconciling the inconsistencies in their informants' representations of their culture may be understood by appreciating the contextual nature of cultural imagery. Fernandez (1986) offers an analysis of some African religious movements which strategically deploy imagery to create periodic senses

of wholeness, showing that cultural imagery must be understood contextually. Similarly, Ewing contends that this inconsistent cultural imagery and strategy to create wholeness is experienced at a personal level as well. Her Pakistani informant, Shamim, presents a series of distinct self-representations that at first glance appears as a highly fragmented vision of self. Yet, each image of self – scholar, obedient daughter, good wife and so on – is experienced internally as a whole. In other words, selfhood is a semiotic process.

> People construct a series of self-representations that are based on selected chains of personal memories. Each self-concept is experienced as a whole and continuous, with its own history and memories that emerge in a specific context, to be replaced by another self-representation when the context changes. (1990: 253)

Throughout this dissertation I have taken a position similar to that of Ewing: representations of self, whether an image or a narrative, are context-dependent; meanings drawn from narratives of self are subject the influences of discursive practices and symbolic spaces in one's social environment.

**Imagined Aboriginality: Flag and Teepee**

In conclusion, I would also like to point out that this adaptive and contextual nature of personal identity is probably true of collective identity as well. I draw upon two incidents both tied to the intensive therapeutic summer camp. The first experience began on the first day of the camp. The earlier mentioned male counsellor initiated the building of a teepee. Being of Saulteaux ancestry, a Plains Indian cultural group, and having worked one summer on a heritage project with a Plains Cree Indian band at a national historic site, I possess some cultural knowledge about teepees and how to construct them. When the counsellor suggested this activity, I drew upon my personal memories and expectantly looked for the raw materials: debarked lodge pole pines, a large properly cut canvas tarp and lots of strong rope. The counsellor had none of this material. Instead, under his directions, residents scattered into the bushes and dragged out whatever pieces of fallen and twisted logs they could find. Soon they had the conical structure up, lashed together with twine. Still, they did not have a canvas tarp. Again residents disappeared, this time into one of the buildings. They retrieved tattered sections

of moth eaten cloth and pieces of left over construction paper. They began sewing and tying the pieces of cloth and sections of construction paper together then lashing them to the logs. Within an hour or even sooner, a small, listing, and well-ventilated patch-work teepee was standing in the common area of the camp. It stood there for the duration of the camp.

After the intensive therapeutic camp ended I learned from a counsellor that many of the residents, including some of the Inuit residents, preferred to use this teepee to conduct their one-on-one meetings between their counsellor and themselves. It had a cozy atmosphere, perhaps a bit culturally familiar. Despite my initial cultural puritanism, I thought the teepee was kind of nice, especially at night when we had a fire burning in there and the wind blowing outside was low. The earlier mentioned resident, Jack, and I had a good conversation in the teepee where he disclosed to me the sad circumstances of his adopted life and what had happened to his biological parents.

For me the teepee represents the healing mission of Nechi House and its reliance upon a discourse of Aboriginality. Under the directions of staff, residents enthusiastically adopted a pan-Amerindian symbol of what it means to be an aboriginal from North America: the generic but immortal teepee. Residents and staff seemed equally comfortable with the teepee's presence at camp. From what I observed of the residents who built the teepee, they really enjoyed the task of constructing it. But most importantly, the teepee served a vital purpose: a spatial venue for the discourse of healing that had a vague cultural familiarity that all residents and staff could, for a short time, enter into and gather around. On two simultaneous levels, then, the teepee was both a personal symbol that residents and staff adopted as a location for healing, and on a collective level it was a cultural symbol that focused them as an "aboriginal" community. Yet, because of my own experiences and knowledge – probably linked to a personal dedication to maintaining a kind of cultural purity – I initially hesitated to accept the "authenticity" of the teepee. Eventually, however, I did accept its iconic status and indulged in its presence at the camp.

The second incident comes from an interview with a Micmac resident. This resident, I felt, succinctly identified the links and parallels between personal and collective identity. He related to me an observation made by a friend of the similarities between an aboriginal person's individual imprisonment in a federal institution to the collective confinement of aboriginal peoples on Indian reserves:

> MM: Oh, another thing – about prisons and the reserve, it's almost the same.
> GB: Prison and reserve, why's that?
> MM: Well, you've got your area, right, like we do [in prison]. We're always being watched. Just about everything is there [in prison and on the reserve] – what we need right. A friend of mine said that. I laughed about that [analogy].
> GB: Do you think that's true?
> MM: In a way, yeah. You think about the boundaries - we pass them, it's illegal. Like, for one instance, we were working, we were cutting [trees] and we passed our boundary. They charged us for illegally cutting. But we won [the court case]. So in a ways, I find [prison and the reserve] the same. [MM 10/97].

The resident, a logger prior to the time he was imprisoned in a federal institution for an unrelated "crime", points out some parallels that exist in the relations between the Canadian State and the collective and personal experiences of aboriginal peoples. In his view, the personal trauma of being incarcerated to a confined socializing space reserved for criminals – legal and *social* deviants – bears disturbing similarities to Native peoples – legal and *cultural* deviants – being forced to live out impoverished existences on small plots of "reserved" land.[54] As well, he poignantly adds, "We're always being watched." In other words, aboriginal peoples, whether living out a condemned existence in a prison or on a reserve, are under some form of constant state-sponsored surveillance, such as by prison guards or forestry officers. In brief, he is suggesting that many aboriginal people(s) are forced to live their lives under confinement.

Following this point in our conversation we began to discuss "the politics" of the House, a topic which interested him because of his family's and community's direct involvement in aboriginal fishing and logging rights. In particular, this resident shared his views on the incident when the "Warrior flag" or "Aboriginal Solidarity flag" was raised on a flag pole at the summer camp. At the time, as mentioned earlier, staff reacted strongly to its

[54] Ironically, this reserved land is held in fiduciary trust by the Federal Government of Canada, the same bureaucratic structure that operates the correctional system.

presence and demanded that residents take it down, which they did after a long group discussion. This Micmac resident, like Jack, who also discussed this incident (see Chapter Three), was angered by the attitude and reaction on the part of the staff towards this form of militant political expression of Aboriginality. What bothered him, he told me, was what he saw as a fear and passivity on the part of staff that prevented some of the residents from expressing an image of Aboriginality associated with resistance and struggle: "I was sort of pissed off. Felt like the *repression* – it was back! What the fuck, right, this is *our land*! We can't hide just what's on a flag! We can't hide as [aboriginal] people, right!" [MM 10/97]

The Warrior/Aboriginal Solidarity flag and the teepee represent distinct and separate statements in the discourse of Aboriginality: the latter is a romantic statement that depicts the aboriginal as belonging to a former way of life gone by; it is an image largely controlled and promoted by the dominant non-native society of North America. On the other hand, the former image is a statement of resistance organic to the militant politics currently expressed among some southern aboriginal populations. As a symbol of militancy, and its association with armed aboriginals in violent conflict with the Canadian State, such as the Oka Crisis of 1990, this flag can come across as very threatening. The fact that both discursive statements appeared simultaneously at Nechi House's intensive therapeutic camp is of interest to me. The clinical staff fostered the more passive symbol, the teepee. Arguably, it presented a more endearing portrayal of the "Whiteman's Indian", as Berkhofer (1978) would argue. They rejected the more aggressive symbol, the flag.

As discussed earlier, a few years before a resident from the House wore this image on a jacket into a local town. Consequently, the association of the flag with Nechi House's therapeutic camp caused a negative and worried (if not ridiculous) over-reaction from the local media and elected municipal officials. In their paranoia, they suspected Hell's Angels and Native militants, or Mohawk Warriors had occupied the camp. Administrative and clinical staff, then, had just cause to be concerned about what image the House's therapeutic camp was projecting to the locals.

The reaction on the part of staff to the flag's reappearance at the camp may be understood by looking at the camp as a spatial venue. The therapeutic camp was about healing; in other words, it was a context. It that seems in the eyes of the staff, the two discursive statements – teepee and flag – in this context were incompatible with each other. On a collective level the clinical staff was trying to cultivate an atmosphere of or a space for healing among residents that demanded they *selectively* draw statements – ideas, images, themes – from the discourse of Aboriginality. As Bateson (1979) suggested the context of certain images, like narratives and self-representations, fixes their meanings. Alternatively, when a specific meaning is being sought, sometimes certain images, narratives, and self-representations do not fit the context; they are inappropriate.

Arguably, in order for Nechi House to survive, the staff must present a self-representation of the House and its mission of aboriginal healing that is non-threatening to the bureaucratic forces that sustain it. That is, Nechi House is nested within a specific historical, political and social context, and it is attempting to exist as an autonomous "aboriginal" community within the hegemonic regime of the Canadian State. The microcosmic aboriginal community of the House through its deployment of generic symbols of pan-Amerindian identity, then, projects onto a larger interpretive/imagined community of aboriginals residing within the national territory of Canada (Anderson 1991). At both levels, I am arguing that these "communities" are attempting to maintain a sense of autonomy and boundary – thereby protecting a self-determined internal coherency or "sense of wholeness" – to survive a certain historical, political and social context of state-sponsored oppression. For persons and peoples denoted as aboriginal, the cultural imagery, personal narratives and self-representations are (contextual) means to an end, not necessarily an (essentialized) end in themselves as some clinical staff might believe.

In closing I wanted to offer the words of an Inuk resident. This resident reported that throughout his life he struggled to make himself understood to others. He felt that the

representations of self he sometimes projected onto others were ambivalent and contradictory. He said:

> DW: Actually, I can be a lot of things. I mean, well, I am one person and, yet, I can be a lot of things. For example, wolf is an animal; it eats other animals and, yet, [it is] very careful. Wolf is kind of an animal that is very careful, very sensitive, and, yet, very dangerous. Therefore I can say I've been that [a wolf] in my rebel young life. I know now that I could consider myself – I've been dog and wolf.
> GB: Dog and wolf?
> DW: Dog and wolf. Dog is tame. Dog is useful. Dog can be used on sleds – to pull the sleds. Dog can know the danger that man doesn't know. But in the past – all our wild life – more likely, in [our former] nomadic life, we've all been like wolves. Therefore, to describe myself to be understood, I'm more likely between dog and wolf. And yet, just a rabbit at heart. But I have to be king like an eagle to see what's ahead of me.
> GB: So, you're all these things all the time?
> DW: I can be all these things. I can be vulture, you know, greedy – money hungry. I can look at animals for what they are and learn of myself, even trace them to be like them so that I survive in this world. [DW 10/09/97]

This Inuk resident speaks of his own apparent inconsistency of self-representations. Over the span of his life, he tells us, he has changed his sense of self. Consequently, he presents a multi-faceted identity tied to a cultural imagery of animals; likely, he has partially drawn upon an Inuit cultural discourse about animals through which he can construct a sense of self. His identity is a process of negotiating the areas of ambivalence in his life and reconciling very distinct aspects of his self. In the end, what he speaks of is a highly personal struggle over meaning which he and his fellow residents at Nechi House have shared throughout their time in the space of the House.

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