NOTICE

AVIS

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

AN INSIDER'S VIEW OF THE WOODS CREE CURSING SYSTEM:

AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

by

GRANT CAMERON INGRAM

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING 1989

Canadä

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
RELEASE FORM

NAME OF AUTHOR: Grant Cameron Ingram

TITLE OF THESIS: An Insider's View of the Woods Cree
Cursing System: An Anthropological
Analysis

DEGREE: Master of Arts

YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED: 1989

..... Grant Ingram ......

7706-Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5H 3R8

Date: April, 1989

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and
recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research,
for acceptance, a thesis entitled **An Insider's View of the
Woods Cree Cursing System: An Anthropological Analysis**
submitted by **Grant Ingram** in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of **Master of Arts in
Anthropology.**

.....*David E. Young*...........
(Supervisor)

....

....

Date ..Nov. 14 1988..

ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on one individual, Russell Willier, a
Woods Cree medicine man from northern Alberta. Studying
the individual is extremely important. Anthropologically,
it is essential to consider the individual from an "emic"
perspective, that is, in the context of her or his
personal and cultural milieu. Psychological
anthropologists have long recognized the importance of the
individual. The "culture and personality" school,
however, tended to see the individual as a mere
replication of culture. This was questioned in the 1960s
by Anthony Wallace, who developed an "organization of
diversity" framework to account for inconsistencies in
personality and the impossibility of totally shared
culture. Some recent theorists of hermeneutic and
dialogic persuasion have challenged the grounds for any
analyst claiming to completely understand another person
or society.

Field research was conducted with Russell Willier on the
Sucker Creek Reserve from June to August 1986. The aim
was to come to an understanding of Russell Williers's
spiritual beliefs, particularly his beliefs surrounding
"cursing." Cursing is bad medicine directed by bad
medicine men and women at their enemies. Russell Willier

is not a bad medicine man and he does not direct curses, but he does spend a great deal of time avoiding, deflecting, neutralizing, and returning them. Cursing is described at length in the thesis. The methodology involved free-ranging conversation, during which Russell, as teacher, imparted to the anthropologist, as student, both the complexity and inconsistency of his beliefs. Portions of these conversations are presented directly in the thesis.

The thesis lays the groundwork for how one could proceed outwards from a systematic analysis of one individual to the "larger picture", but at the same time alllowing the main actor to remain the focal point of the expanded study. Thus, the thesis is a significant, albeit experimental, attempt to understand one individual's beliefs and actions from an organization of diversity and dialogic point of view. It depicts Woods Cree cursing, about which little, if anything, is known. The conclusion is that there are many levels of reality co-existent within the natural world, and Russell Willier's reality is valid, though the understanding of it conveyed in this thesis is necessarily incomplete.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following people and
institutions who have made this thesis possible:

Russell Willier, who patiently taught me a great deal
about his medicine and way of life. Yvonne Willier, who
allowed me to be part of the Willier family during my stay
at their home.

Dr. David Young, my supervisor, whose knowledge and
expertise from teaching twenty-odd years of psychological
anthropology allowed us to engage in an ongoing dialogue
that was very much to my benefit in terms of developing a
practical and theoretical orientation.

Leonard Smith, for his editorial expertise from the start
to the finish of the thesis.

Sharon Wilson, for her painstaking transcription of
fieldwork tapes.

My fellow students, Yvonne Dion-Buffalo, Lise Swartz, Judy
Pettigrew, and Randy Johnson for their helpful comments
and support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING THE INDIVIDUAL

Overview

A human being is complex. The central aim of anthropology
is to understand this complexity in both biological and
cultural terms. The difficulty (many now would say
impossibility) of achieving a "unified science of
humanity" has led researchers to move outward in different
directions and to explore new avenues of insight in recent
years.

The subfield of psychological anthropology has developed
largely in response to the oversimplification of issues
concerning the relationship between the individual and
society. In the quest for a fuller understanding of human
complexity, psychological anthropology has contributed
this important message: <u>don't forget about the
individual.</u>

The above message is being taken seriously by some
anthropologists, which may signify the beginning of a
paradigm shift (Sperber 1985; Watson and Watson-Frank
1985; Keesing 1987). Psychological anthropology is now
part of mainstream anthropology, after having been

relegated to a peripheral position for many years.
Researchers are now attempting to deal with the complexity
of actual individuals. But this endeavor has not
proceeded far enough. Too many anthropologists are still
paying lip service to the most important source of data -
the individual. This thesis will argue that before
questions can be answered adequately regarding the dynamic
nature of sociocultural diversity in general, and sharing
in the areas of belief and motivation in particular, the
individual must be studied in his/her own right, both
systematically and in depth.

One of the greatest strengths of cultural anthropology in
the past, the inclusion of the human element, has all but
disappeared in the contemporary literature. In reading
anthropological monographs and journals one becomes
painfully aware of the absence of human subjects, the real
living people who are the basis for ethnography.
Anthropology is said to be grounded in both the humanities
and the sciences. Why then, one asks, has cultural
anthropology chosen to emulate predominately the "hard
sciences"? Current realization of an artificial dichotomy
between the humanities and the sciences has facilitated
movement towards a synthesis which takes into
consideration dynamic human interaction and the complexity
of individuals. This movement is predicated upon a

growing dissatisfaction with many of the traditional
approaches to anthropological fieldwork and writing (Asad
1973; Geertz 1973,1976; Crapanzano 1977; Dwyer
1977,1979,1982; Rabinow 1977; Rabinow and Sullivan 1979;
Tedlock 1979,1983; Fabian 1983; Stocking 1983; Clifford
and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fisher 1986; Clifford 1988;
Van Maanen 1988). This thesis is a step towards a
synthesis between the humanities and the sciences.

In the opening chapter of the thesis I briefly examine the
development of culture and personality studies in the
historical development of psychological anthropology.
This literature will be assessed in terms of its attention
to both the role of the individual and the role of the
investigator in anthropological interpretation and
discourse. The strengths and weaknesses of traditional
culture and personality studies are outlined in order to
provide a framework for newer approaches which emphasize
the process of interaction between anthropologists and the
people with whom they work.

Culture and Personality:
The Hypothetical Individual

There have been many works to suggest that the influence
of Freudian theory in the development of anthropology, and
in particular psychological anthropology, cannot be
overestimated (Kluckhohn 1944,1945,1957; La Barre
1958,1978; Boyer 1978; Bock 1980,1988; Wallace 1983). For
the first time a dynamic theory of personality was
available that had implications for understanding the
broader concept of culture. Freud's major anthropological
works, Totem and Taboo (1915), The Future of an Illusion
(1927), Civilization and its Discontents (1930), and Moses
and Monotheism (1939) gave rise to the idea that
individual behavior is governed by unconscious forces
acting from within in the form of instincts, drives, and
repressed desires. Moreover, these combined forces are
seen as responsible for the development of culture. To
give an example, if the direct goal or object of
attainment of a person is withheld or blocked, he or she
may be forced to "go around" this blockage, settling for a
substitute object. The more closely related to the
original goal or object, the more likely it will satisfy
the person's need. When energy is displaced or channelled
in this manner into something that is highly valued by

society, such as art or music, it is termed sublimation.
In this way, cultural forms in all their complexity can be
understood as compensating mechanisms for the overall
needs of individuals which can never be fully expressed.
The basic unit of analysis in psychoanalytic theory is the
individual; cultural institutions exist to serve the
unconscious needs of people.

With the influence of important researchers in the
development of the culture and personality field, such as
Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, the psychoanalytic
equation is reversed. In contrast to the premises of
earlier psychoanalytic theory, the individual is now seen
to be extremely malleable and irrevocably shaped by the
dominant cultural influences of his/her society.

Although Benedict's Patterns of Culture (1934), Mead's
Coming of Age in Samoa (1942) and Growing up in New Guinea
(1953) differ in significant ways, a common theme is
evident. While both authors were well aware of the
existence of individual variation in personality and
comportment, it was believed that in every society there
exists a unique type of social patterning or
"configuration" that permeates all aspects of that
society. This is not to say, however, that personality
and culture are isomorphic.

Configurationist arguments, which have often been
misinterpreted, usually avoid making causal statements. A
close relation or integration of childhood experience,
adult personality, and cultural institutions is assumed,
but the argument is often much more sophisticated than its
detractors would give it credit for:

> Within each culture there comes into being
> characteristic purposes not necessarily shared
> by other types of societies... Taken up by a
> well-integrated culture, the most ill-assorted
> acts become characteristic of its peculiar
> goals, often by the most unlikely
> metamorphoses. The form that these acts take
> we can understand only by understanding first
> the emotional and intellectual mainsprings of
> that society (Benedict 1934:42). ·

Child-raising practices are consistent with adult
personality, religious ideologies, and so forth, because
there is a culture core - but the link is not necessarily
causal. Child-raising practices are one way to
communicate the basic attitudes associated with the core,
but these attitudes can also be communicated through a
host of other cultural institutions.

While there was an emphasis upon long-term fieldwork based
upon participant-observation in the early era of culture
and personality studies, the assumptions of both
psychoanalytically-inclined anthropological theorists and

cultural configurationalists influenced the ways in which
data were collected in the field. In the case of the
former, because cultural factors were a reflection of
collective individual needs, data were collected on
phenomena such as myths, ceremonies, customs, jokes, art,
and dreams as a means of studying the motivational
dynamics of the group that produced them. In other words,
individuals did not have to be studied directly. Cultural
configurationalist analyses (later, with tongue firmly in
cheek, termed the "shreds and patches" method) also tended
to be largely inferential. Individuals did not have to be
studied directly, as socialization practices, cultural
patterns, and symbolic systems were held to be reflective
of one another. One could start collecting data in any
area and the results would shed light upon other areas.
Ultimately, both psychoanalytic anthropologists and
cultural configurationists tended to look at similar kinds
of data - largely cultural data.

Basic Personality Structure

The concept of basic personality structure (BPS),
developed by the psychoanalyst Abram Kardiner and the
anthropologist Ralph Linton between 1935 and 1939, was,
like psychoanalytic and configurational concepts, derived
largely from cultural data. Its proponents, however,

believed the concept to be superior (Kardiner and Linton
1939). Bock summarizes the main tenets underlying this
concept:

> Culture is integrated, they say, because all
> the members of a society share certain early
> experiences that produce a specifiable basic
> personality structure, and because this BPS in
> turn creates and maintains other aspects of
> the culture. This assumption leads to a
> division of culture into two parts: primary
> institutions, which produce a "common
> denominator" of basic personality, and
> secondary institutions, which are produced by
> the BPS (1980:87).

Primary institutions include subsistence patterns and
child-raising practices in a certain society. Secondary
institutions include religion, myths, folklore, and art.
An individual's early experience is held to have lasting
effects on personality formation, especially on the
development of secondary institutions. Here we see the
direct influence of Freudian psychology (Edwin 1977;
Wallace 1983). The techniques that members of a certain
society use to raise children are culturally patterned and
therefore tend to be similar (though not identical) for
various families within that society. These
culturally-patterned techniques will be different from one
society to another. Nevertheless, within a society,
similar childhood experiences produce similar personality
configurations. Consequently, members of any society will
have key elements of personality in common. Because

experiences necessarily differ from society to society,
basic personality structures will also differ.

Projective systems are the means by which basic
personality structure produces secondary institutions.
Such systems are derived through unconscious processes by
which secondary institutions such as art and religion are
established as adjustive mechanisms. In other words,
secondary institutions are epiphenomenal and required only
if the basic personality structure in a society is flawed.
The more "hangups" that the BPS has in a society, the
richer that society's secondary institutions will be.
Again we see the direct influence of Freudian thought.

The following simplified example from Alorese society,
based on Kardiner's analysis of ethnographic data
collected by Cora Du Bois, (1945:101-170) and personal
communication from D. Young, illustrates the above model:
Alorese women work all day in the fields. The men hunt
and conduct business. After childbirth, women care for
their children at home for two weeks, then resume work in
the fields. Children are left in the care of siblings who
may be quite young themselves. Babies often cry most of
the day until the mothers return from the fields.

Accordingly, Kardiner concludes that child care is

inconsistent and irregular; socialization involves
threats; and there is little active teaching of the young.
The resulting basic personality structure is held to be
insecure; lacking in trust, self-esteem, and confidence;
and displaying weak libidinal ties due to superficial
emotional bonding. Characterisic behavior patterns
include an emphasis on male-dominant sex roles; and on
status, wealth, and the subjugation of others.
Ambivalence towards females is reflected by high divorce
rates and unstable family structure.

In the secondary institutions of Alorese society we see
witchcraft as well as a general ambivalent attitude
displayed towards deities and ancestors. In folk tales we
witness the theme of trickster, parents mistreating their
children, and people murdering one another.

Kardiner and Linton (1939) did not believe it was
necessary to obtain data directly from individuals in
order to formulate basic personality structure and
projective systems as relevant information could be
obtained indirectly from an analysis of society's primary
and secondary institutions. While the model is more
explicitly causal than configurational approaches, the
authors were obviously well aware that individuals in a
society are not identical with regard to personality. The

concept of basic personality structure can be likened to
an onion, in which the core of the onion corresponds to
fundamental attitudes and values that are fomulated early
in life from a shared core of experience. On top of this
"core" many layers are added, accounting for
idiosyncracies and individual differences in personality.
All that is claimed is that there are key factors during
early socialization (that differ significantly in each
society) which become an integral part of an individual's
attitudes and values later in life.

Modal Personality

Although many researchers in the area of culture and
personality studies believed that it was not necessary to
study individuals directly before making broad
generalizations about an entire group of people, it became
apparent to others that in order to validate such
abstractions, a more direct approach was required.

The concept of modal personality originated with Cora Du
Bois. The People of Alor: A Social-Psychological Study
of an East Indian Island (1944) based on Du Bois'
fieldwork in the then Dutch East Indies from 1938-1939,
was a collaborative attempt to "test" systematically the
theory of basic personality structure. Data were

collected by combining psychological testing (including
Rorschach responses, children's drawings, and word
association responses) and autobiographical information in
the form of life histories which were to be evaluated
later by experts to see if Kardiner's interpretation of
Alorese basic personality structure could be supported by
independent analysis. Although Kardiner claimed that the
basic personality approach could be validated in this
manner, Du Bois had sufficient misgivings to develop an
alternative approach:

> Without explicitly rejecting the notion of
> BPS, she put forward an idea that many
> psychological anthropologists have found more
> acceptable than Kardiner's formulation--the
> concept of modal personality (MP). The term
> mode refers to a statistical concept that can
> be simply expressed as "most frequent."
> Therefore, when we speak of the modal
> personality of a group, we are referring to
> the most frequent type encountered in our
> sample. The modal type need not be the
> "average" person. Indeed, it may not even be
> in the majority; it is simply the most
> frequent (Bock 1988:68-69).

Du Bois, in the preface to the 1961 paperback edition of
The People of Alor, diverges even further from Kardiner's
claims in regard to basic personality structure. Here, Du
Bois allows for the possibility that the arguments
(largely originating from Kardiner) forwarded in the
original (1944) version "may have oversimplified the
congruities and largely ignored incongruities and
discrepancies" between cultural institutions and

individual personality (1961:viii). Consequently, she now expects the kinds of testing done in the formulation of Alorese basic personality to result in the "high probability that only a small percentage of people in a society belong to these modal groups" (1961:xx).

We see that up until this point, even when the intent was to study the individual directly, the dominant assumptions of the culture and personality field coloured the ways in which data were interpreted. The minds of researchers were already set in terms of the relationship of individuals to society. The enormous complexity and range of variation within any society were avoided in the continuing attempt to discover the illusive pattern or norm. Nonetheless, during this era of culture and personality studies we witness the beginning of a tendency to break away from normative approaches to the study of the individual/group relationship, as a more dynamic picture of human interaction is sought.

Although the concept of modal personality was basically a compromise, it later provided the impetus for a major shift in interpretation. Unfortunately, researchers were not yet equipped with a model that would adequately make sense of human diversity without reducing it to a set of highly abstract formulas lacking a legitimate ontological

basis. Even though approaches such as life-history documentation were solidly grounded upon the individual, the questions asked of such documents merely attempted to reinforce the mistaken principles underlying the entire culture and personality endeavor.

The Hypothetical Individual Re-examined: Modal Personality Reconsidered

Cora Du Bois, although having to compromise, as we have seen, made a significant advance in conceptualizing the relationship of individuals to culture. Rather than reify a concept, as had been done with basic personality structure, Du Bois realized that modal personality was "an abstraction and a generalization" (1944:4). Dogmatic assumptions about the nature of the individual/group relationship were beginning to be questioned. The concept of modal personality represented an advance in conceptualizing the relationship of the individual to the group, but at the same time it was based on a hypothetical construct with no meaningful grounding in actual individuals.

I turn now to a monograph by Anthony Wallace (1952) entitled "The Modal Personality Structure of the Tuscarora Indians as Revealed by the Rorschach Test", which can be considered a transitional step towards the next significant development in culture and personality studies. Wallace's fieldwork project was conducted in an Iroquois Indian community near Buffalo, New York, while he was a doctoral student at Columbia University in the late 1940s. As we have seen, the intention of Cora Du Bois' Alorese study was to subject the concept of basic personality structure to rigorous testing in a fieldwork situation. Wallace, similarly, set out to test the modified concept of modal personality. Wallace's research looked for "the type of psychological structure most characteristic of the adult Tuscarora Indians of this community, insofar as it can be inferred from the obtained Rorschach sample" (1952:1).

The crucial difference in Wallace's research design was that he did not assume a "typical individual" or "average personality structure". Rather than assume a common personality structure by averaging all of his data into one abstract Rorschach profile representing an entire group, Wallace calculated the "mode" for each of twenty-one factors; that is, he calculated the Rorschach

scores for each of seventy individuals before establishing
a "modal class". Before being assigned to the modal
class, an individual score had to fall within the modal
range for all of the twenty-one factors being tested. The
results of Rorschach testing of a sample of seventy
individuals indicated that only twenty-six of seventy
adhered to the established modal class (1952:67). Wallace
was aware that his modal class did not constitute the
majority of his sample, but he nevertheless described the
modal class in terms of an abstracted Tuscarora
personality agreggate composed of value-laden trait
characteristics:

> one might describe the Tuscarora modal
> personality type as displaying: (1) on a basic
> but presumably largely unconscious level, a
> strong urge to be allowed to become passive
> and dependent; (2) a fear of rejection and
> punishment by the environment and by the self
> for these demands; (3) a compensatory drive to
> be hyperindependent, aggressive,
> self-sufficient; (4) an ultimate incapacity to
> feel, to adapt, to evaluate the environment
> realistically, and a concomitant dependence
> upon categories, stereotypes, and deductive
> logic (Wallace 1952:75).

What is most significant in this study is not that Wallace
was indecisive in his treatment of normative concepts but
that he was beginning to consider the possibility that the
normative framework he had previously adopted was invalid.
He acknowledges that "it would seem that people with
widely differing personalities can within certain limits

use the same culture - for different purposes, perhaps -
and thereby play successful and rewarding roles"
(1952:82n).

Resolving The Problem of The Hypothetical Individual:
Replication of Uniformity vs. Organization of Diversity

With this seed of doubt planted as early as 1952, Wallace
went on to develop a radically different way of
conceptualizing the relationship of the individual to
culture. The fallacies of the hypothetical individual are
disclosed in very convincing fashion. Wallace points out
the absurdity of the "near-perfect correspondence" between
culture and the individual which we have seen in examples
of culture and personality studies above:

> One extreme formulation of the replication
> approach -- the microcosmic metaphor -- is so
> nearly tautological as to make empirical
> investigation unnecessary. It takes many
> forms, but they convey in common the
> proposition that inside the head of "the
> -------" (adjectival form of name of group
> inserted here) is a little replica of his
> group's culture, systematically transformed,
> point for point, to fit neural tissue, which
> he has "internalized." This replica is "the
> -------" personality (1961:123-124).

When normative postulates inherent in culture and
personality studies are rejected, new questions concerning
the relationship of the individual to culture become

possible:

> In other investigations, it is sometimes more
> interesting to consider the actual diversity
> of habits, of motives, of personalities, of
> customs that do, in fact, coexist within the
> boundaries of any culturally organized
> society. When the fact of diversity is
> emphasized, the obvious question must
> immediately be asked: how do such various
> individuals organize themselves culturally
> into orderly, expanding, changing societies?
> When the process of socialization is examined
> closely, it becomes apparent that, within the
> limits of practical human control and
> observation, it is not a perfectly reliable
> mechanism for replication ... Nor can the
> phenomenological world of an individual, or of
> a people, be assumed to be understood by the
> anthropologist, once he can predict the
> movement of their bodies; rather, he must
> recognize the possibility of a radical
> diversity of mazeways that have their orderly
> relationship guaranteed not by the sharing of
> uniformity, but by their capacity for mutual
> prediction (1961:23-24).

What then are the implications of the possibility of a
"radical diversity of mazeways" in terms of the role of
the anthropologist in doing fieldwork? Before answering
this question, it is necessary to explore the nature of
anthropological understanding.

The Nature of Anthropological Understanding:
The Myth of the Objective Anthropologist

The discipline of anthropology has, by and large, relied
upon the mistaken assumption that the investigator can be
"objective"; that is, that the investigator can accurately

reflect what is "out there", without taking into consideration his/her role in the process of understanding. As a result, anthropologists, implicitly or explicitly, expect that their fieldwork data should be replicable (Malinowsky 1922; Boas 1940; Evans-Prichard 1940; Radcliffe-Brown 1952; Whiting and Child 1953). In the great majority of anthropological studies the investigator is not considered to be important, one presumes, because of the tendency of anthropology to have set out on a course whereby the rigors of the "hard sciences" are to be imitated at all costs. What is the nature of anthropological understanding, though? By outlining the central ideas expressed in the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer (based on his major work Truth and Method 1975) I intend to demonstrate the futility of any attempt at "objectivity" in anthropological fieldwork that ignores the intrinsically hermeneutic nature of the endeavor.

The following statement outlines the a priori conditions, not only for Gadamer's hermeneutics, but for the very act of understanding. In this statement, Gadamer challenges traditional Western epistemology which continues to be restricted by the Cartesian subject/object dichotomy, and the notion of truth as correspondence:

> In fact history does not belong to us, but we
> belong to it. Long before we understand
> ourselves through the process of
> self-examination, we understand ourselves in a
> self-evident way in the family, society and
> state in which we live. The focus of
> subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The
> self-awareness of the individual is only a
> flickering in the closed circuits of
> historical life. That is why the prejudices
> of the individual, far more than his
> judgements, constitute the historical reality
> of his being (Gadamer 1975:245).

Rather than attempting to establish a method to obtain
absolute, certain knowledge, Gadamer seeks to re-establish
the conditions for the possibility of understanding
anything at all. Historically, the Cartesian model has
taken truth to be a matter of correspondence, whereby the
goal of interpretation becomes a matter of saying what is
"correct" about objects or experience in general.
Correspondence (truth) is secured by means of clear and
distinct ideas. The question of truth therefore becomes
the adequacy of claims by a knowing subject with respect
to a given world of objects. An entire methodology has
emerged out of the correspondence theory of truth, with
the goal of ensuring "objective" knowledge for the knowing
subject.

Like Heidegger (1962), Gadamer believes that what it means
to be human is to interpret. Interpretation is the
fundamental characteristic of Dasein, or There-being.

Dasein constitutes our mode of being-in-the-world, and
therefore is intrinsically hermeneutic. There can be no
interpretation or truth independent of one's
being-in-the-world. When understanding and interpretation
in terms of Dasein are taken into account, truth becomes
more than just a matter of using the correct methodology
to ensure objective knowledge. For Gadamer, understanding
and interpretation become the essential hermeneutic
concerns.

Gadader asks how being-in-the-world is possible at all.
The Heideggerian claim that understanding is the way we
are is implicit when Gadamer turns to the question of what
it is to understand. That there is understanding is not
in question. Understanding is our mode of being in the
world. How understanding is possible is in question,
thereby placing Gadamer outside of traditional Western
epistemology.

Human beings are always situated within an historical
tradition. Understanding is possible only by virtue of
being immersed in an historical process. Hermeneutics
must then face the issue, "what is history?" Presumably
for Gadamer, history is not simply what is temporally
past, or what human beings have done, but is tied up
directly with changes in our interpretive frameworks.

Gadamer believes that the whole notion of history and
understanding must be re-thought. At this point he
introduces the concept of prejudice, a concept very
different from our colloquial understanding of the term.
Rather than prejudices simply constituting a negative
limitation upon some possible human nature or mode of
understanding, prejudices are built into the very
structure of understanding, and indeed, establish the
conditions of the possibility of understanding anything at
all. Prejudices are not something that are merely
acquired or gotten rid of at will, but include the whole
range of pre-understanding or fore-knowledge that is a
necessary condition for any understanding at all. To be
human is to interpret. To interpret is to be immersed
within an interpretive context and an historical process;
yet not as an "objective" context that we could simply
survey, but as an integral part of our being. To
eliminate this context is to eliminate the very nature of
understanding itself.

Culture as Shared: The Problem of Inconsistency
And Variation In Individual Data

The concept of culture holds a nearly mystical position
within the discipline of anthropology; yet almost no two

anthropologists can agree on the meaning of the term. Culture as a shared meaning system seems relatively straightforward at first glance, but what does it mean to share something such as culture? What exactly is shared? What is shared can only be constructed by outside observers who attribute sharing to behavior that may or may not be an example of sharing in an ontological sense. In other words, culture is a construct, and is therefore not shared in any ontological sense; or at any rate, no one can prove that it is. The idea of culture as shared is a shorthand expression for conceptualizing complex processes that are ultimately grounded within, and not between, individuals (Young and Bonnichsen 1984:12).

Unfortunately, culture as shared too often has been reified and given the status of an ontological entity. Individuals are seen to exibit consistency in behavior, and this consistency is attributed to shared meaning systems or culture. Is individual behavior consistent, though? From the work of Anthony Wallace (1961:36-38) it would seem that consistency in behavior and corresponding belief would, rather than being the norm, be a maladaptive strategy in human affairs. The complexity of what may actually be taking place, both at an individual level and at the level of interaction between individuals, becomes lost in the anthropological effort to produce broad

generalizations. A more fine-grained look at what may be happening, based on the assumption that groups in order to operate need not be integrated in terms of similar motivation, values, personality, and world views of their members, reveals a whole new dimension of complexity.

Although Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics provides a necessary and convincing critique of Cartesian objectivity, he is not overly concerned with the individual. In addition to being immersed in an historical process as an integral component of our being, this thesis proposes that the individual is unique. Viewed in this manner the problem of inconsistency and variation in individual behavior becomes a boon to the discipline of anthropology, and not something to ignore or average out in the hopes that it will somehow go away. As we shall see, individual variation provides anthropology not only with a never-ending source of data, but with the means to break away from a dominant paradigm that has long-ago reached the point of stagnation.

"Beyond Objectivity":
The Life History Approach Re-Examined

We have seen some of the problems that occur when the individual is not taken seriously in anthropological

interpretation. The remainder of the thesis will be devoted to an exploration of how such problems can be remedied. We start with an examination of what can be considered to be basically a sound approach within culture and personality research - namely, the life history. As Watson and Watson-Frank (1985:1) indicate, the life history has occupied a marginal role within the social sciences. The potential of the life history approach in generating new insights into not only the individual but basic anthropological issues has only begun to be explored. As the historical and theoretical developments of the life history approach are beyond the scope of this thesis, the discussion will focus on the limitations of this kind of approach as it has been used in the past and the potential of employing a life history perspective in conjuntion with a more reflexive orientation - that of hermeneutics and phenomenology (see Kluckhohn 1945; Dollard 1949; Langness 1965; Langness and Frank 1981 for summaries of the status and potential of the life history).

Data generated by life history research in the area of culture and personality studies can be considered to be generally valid because data were collected from actual individuals. To take an example, <u>Sun Chief: The Autobiography of a Hopi Indian</u> (Simmons 1942) was one of

the best documents to emerge out of the life history genre
during this era of culture and personality studies. The
document is noteworthy in that the author, Leo Simmons, in
addition to allowing the principal informant to speak in
terms of retrospective recall and through diaries,
"provided the immediate context of the document including
a description of the relationship between the narrator and
the ethnographer" (Watson and Watson-Frank 1985:8).

The "raw" data contained in Sun Chief, as well as some of
the author's attempts to provide "adequate descriptive
comments" (after Sperber 1982:11-12), can be considered to
be well ahead of its time in terms of attention to the
individual, and reflexivity of approach. On the other
hand, later interpretations of the life history material
in Sun Chief (such as that of Aberle, 1967) asks the
futile question, "is Don Talayesva (the principal actor) a
typical Hopi". It becomes clear that Aberle was not able
to break out of the dominant paradigm of his era.
Aberle's approach, based on "outsider" and normative
orientations, is blinded to the possibilities that arise
from a detailed examination of an individual life.
The current use of hermeneutic and phenomenological
orientations are adding radically different dimensions to
the ways in which documents such as life histories have
been approached in the past. Interpreting Life Histories

by Watson and Watson-Frank (1985) is a good example of
the potential of hermeneutic and phenomenological
orientations to expand our understanding of not only the
individual but of basic anthropological issues. While the
authors tend to emphasize the fact that a life history
helps us understand a unique human life, they do not rule
out the potential of an expanded life history approach for
wider anthropological applications:

> Why do we make something other than the
> individual the starting point in approaching
> the life history? Perhaps because our minds
> are inescapably bound to theory. By
> inclination, social scientists tend to
> approach the particular through the general.
> But why can we not use the individual to
> understand the individual and build from there
> to understand the general characteristics of
> the individual-culture relationship
> (1985:159).

Watson and Watson-Frank begin to provide a solution to the
seemingly irreconcialable gulf between insider and
outsider perspectives, a solution that is not rigid in
application, but instead, dependent upon flexibility and
innovation:

> If our etic constructs or categories are to
> have functional equivalence cross-culturally -
> that is, if they are to mean approximately the
> same thing to different individuals in their
> different subjective frames of reference - we
> must be prepared to correct our categories
> hermeneutically by projecting them into a
> dialectical relationship with the object of
> interpretation. To do so we must use our
> constructs to ask questions that are
> appropriate to the context of our data.

> Theoretically, this process should enable us
> to change our context of analysis and bring it
> into touch with our data, but in such a manner
> that our framework describes something of the
> essential meaning of the data without
> completely sacrificing its original abstract
> properties (1985:185).

The other side is in sight, but the bridge is yet to be crossed. The authors believe that the abyss can be transcended. It is the position of this thesis that an organization of diversity model presents a solid framework to begin an exploration of possible solutions to the reconciliation of emic and etic perspectives in anthropology. It is argued that an organization of diversity approach is well suited to the type of dialectical relationship or "dialogue" that is recommended by Watson and Watson-Frank as being essential to any bridging of emic and etic perspectives. The concept of organization of diversity can provide a framework in which to interpret data with minimal distortion of the emic point of view, while at the same time, not sacrificing the rigors of formal analysis. Thus, it is argued that it is possible to do "good science" and at the same time remain faithful to what has constituted cultural anthropology's greatest contibution - the communication of different ways of being-in-the-world.

Ethnography as a Record of the Interaction
Between the Individual and the Ethnographer

It becomes obvious that in the culture and personality studies that we have examined, the investigator is completely absent. We can only speculate on this conspicuous absence in terms of the myth of the objective anthropologist, who, as passive observer, is able to convey the reality of what is "out there" in an unbiased manner, which if done properly, can be duplicated by another "unbiased investigator" at a different point in time and/or space. Unfortunately, ethnography is not just a record of a certain group of people. "What these people are really like" must always depend on the question of "from whose perspective".

If each individual is considered to be unique (and this uniqueness includes both the ethnographer and the people with whom he or she works) and Cartesian "objectivity" is an impossibility within the human sciences, the anthropologist's task becomes, above all, interpretive. It is the position of this thesis that serious attention to the above statement can result in the needed impetus for anthropology to emerge out of the quagmire in which it presently finds itself. Rather than maintain that the

impossibility of objectivity is a problem to be overcome in anthropology, it can be turned into the discipline's greatest asset. The attempt to understand and work within the limits imposed by a lack of objectivity opens up new and rich sources of data. If one is interested in processual generalizations rather than static descriptions one must take seriously the idea that the basis for ethnography necessarily resides in each anthropologist. This necessitates that the process of understanding that evolves as a result of fieldwork be recorded in a radically different manner from that of the past.

Researchers in the culture and personality field must have felt they were close to answering some of the basic questions about the relationship of the individual to society and culture. Instead of viewing the Culture and Personality school as a dead end, we can continue the search in a more dynamic way. If the role of the anthropologist is considered to be the basis for all anthropological interpretation, the implications for anthropological theory and methodology are far-reaching. Since each individual is unique, in that his/her interpretive context differs from that of another person, an anthropologist's experience in the field will necessarily differ from that of any other anthropologist, even if they are immersed in a similar "interpretive

framework". Equally important, by interacting with
individuals during fieldwork, the anthropologist changes
the situation. The anthropologist becomes not only
interpreter, but actor. If the old idea in anthropology,
that non-replicable data is somehow flawed, is discarded,
new possibilities emerge. If both anthropologists and the
individuals they work with are considered to be unique
individuals, and each fieldwork situation is different,
there is no limit to the insights a field situation can
contribute to the discipline.

While many would claim that such a state of affairs is
antithetical to the task of science, and that infinite
possibility is nothing more than infinite relativism, this
thesis refers the skeptics to the hermeneutics of Gadamer
and the fact that "such a state of affairs" is the basis
for any understanding at all. The concluding chapter of
the thesis will come back to the above issues.

Thesis Outline

In chapter two I focus on the experience of doing
anthropological fieldwork. Issues raised in chapter one
are illustrated with reference to fieldwork conducted from
June to August, 1986, on the Sucker Creek Reserve in
northern Alberta. The main actor, Russell Willier, a

practicing Woods Cree healer, is introduced. The nature of the interaction between Willier and myself is discussed with reference to how this process influenced both data collection and the data themselves. Willier's beliefs pertaining to "cursing" are summarized. The fieldwork data are then examined in terms of apparent inconsistency and variation in belief and practice.

The final chapter, chapter three, begins with a summary of the thesis. The focus is on the implications of issues raised and on recent trends bearing on these issues. The next section of this chapter concentrates on how one could proceed outward from a systematic analysis of one individual to the "larger picture", but at the same time, allowing the main actor to remain the focal point of the expanded study. It will be argued that a dialogue between emic and etic perspectives can be undertaken in a new way, with the long-term goal of operationalizing an "organization of diversity" analysis. Finally, ethnographic and methodological suggestions are forwarded, based on experiences while doing fieldwork and during the actual writing of the thesis.

CHAPTER II

THE FIELD EXPERIENCE

In chapter one it was emphasized that if anthropological
fieldwork is to generate meaningful data it must be
thoroughly grounded in actual individuals, and that the
anthropologist is necessarily an integral component of the
data-gathering process. What follows is an examination of
the complexities and the possibilities involved when
attempting to understand the point of view of another.

Background Information on Russell Willier

As of 1988 Russell Willier is 37 years old. The idea of a
medicine man brings to mind a stereotypic image of a much
older person, perhaps with long gray hair, a wise and
wrinkled countenance, and a spiritual detachment from the
everyday world and all of its trappings. This image is
shattered by an introduction to this Woods Cree healer.
Willier's charismatic presence is felt immediately. His
love of people is obvious, and his energetic, outgoing
nature, combined with warmth and a sometimes mischievous
sense of humour, makes Willier a person to whom others are
usually drawn.

Willier enjoys being involved with people, and is as much
at home in front of an audience of medical anthropology
students as he is presiding over a sweatlodge ceremony.
It is a strongly held belief of Willier that in order for
a medicine man to do his job he must be able to
communicate with each person at his/her own level. This
necessitates being able to deal with people from all walks
of life and in any situation that may present itself, a
skill that Willier believes he must continually work at in
order to remain a successful healer.

The ethnographer was amazed at the number and range of
people whom Willier knew on a first-hand basis. The
healer is aware of the effect of his presence on others,
and indeed jokes that he is the "spark" of the Sucker
Creek Reserve and that when he goes away for a time,
things are somehow "not the same". Whether people approve
or disapprove, agree or disagree with Mr. Willier, his
presence is difficult to ignore.

Willier was born on the Sucker Creek Reserve. He grew up
in a family of 12 brothers and sisters. His parents
worked hard to ensure that the children would be able to
follow successfully the Sweetgrass Trail. Willier's
father was a skilled hunter and trapper, among other

occupations, and thoroughly acquainted with the traditional Woods Cree knowledge and way of life.

During his childhood and young adulthood Willier had much experience in both native and non-native communities. He attended Catholic mission school, then quit in order to help on the family farm. He has worked at a variety of jobs, in the larger community and on the reserve.

Willier's decision and commitment to become a healer did not come about easily. As a young boy he was rather "unusual" in regard to his interest in and love of the natural world. When others of his age would still be sleeping in the morning, Willier would be out exploring and observing nature. While he did not think of his behavior as unusual, others in his family saw it as indicating a potential to heal. Willier was in line to receive a Medicine Bundle (Medicine Bundles are passed from one generation to another, sometimes skipping a generation, as in Willier's case when his father saved the bundle for him, not utilizing it himself) from his great-grandfather, Moostoos. Moostoos was a well-respected medicine man and chief who was one of the original co-signers of Treaty 8. Willier's adoption of the role of medicine man took a more circuitous route. Willier lived the "wild life" for a period during his

youth, before his interest turned to becoming a healer.

In many ways Willier is a "self-styled healer". He did
not follow what is thought of as the more "traditional"
role of apprenticeship under one teacher. Much of the
knowledge concerning the contents of the Medicine Bundle
had to be obtained through contact with several medicine
men in the area. The bundle held combinations of herbs
wrapped together for different cures. Willier had to
discover not only the identities of individual herbs and
their usage but also the use of combinations of herbs. In
the course of learning his calling, Willier has been
willing to incorporate knowledge from many different
sources.

Willier's enthusiasm to learn and his ability to innovate
has not stopped. He is continually seeking new and better
methods to bring to his healing repertoire. He views the
role of medicine man as entailing a learning process which
will continue throughout the course of his life.

Willier's cooperation and willingness to talk about his
work has evolved gradually. Without a long period of
trust-building having taken place, an anthropologist could
not simply approach a healer and expect him/her to talk
freely. Fortunately for the ethnographer, this process

was initiated by Dr. Young during the course of a project
for the documentation of traditional hide tanning methods.
Willier is trained in the traditional way of tanning
hides, and he is a skilled hunter, trapper and
professional guide. As trust and friendship developed,
Willier gradually began to talk about his involvment with
native religion and culture. In 1984 the healer agreed to
participate in the Psoriasis Research Project, an
experiment involving the treatment of non-native psoriasis
sufferers in an Edmonton clinic in 1984 and 1985 (see
Young, Morse, Swartz, and Ingram 1988; Morse, Young,
Swartz, and McConnell 1988; Morse, McConnell, and Young
1988).

By sharing aspects of his knowledge with non-natives,
Willier is taking risks. He faces criticism and possible
ridicule from the medical establishment. At the same
time, he is open to condemnation from some members of the
native community for sharing what they consider to be
sacred, secret knowledge with outsiders. More seriously,
he faces the ever-present danger that he or someone close
to him will be hit by a "curse".

Willier is well aware of these risks. He believes that
what he is trying to accomplish is important enough to
warrant "challenging the system". Willier is concerned

that Indian medicine is in danger of being lost as elders pass away and young people lose interest in their heritage. He hopes to demonstrate the efficacy of native medicine to a wider audience. He believes this will help regenerate a sense of pride in native young people, and at the same time, stimulate their interest in native medicine and culture. He also would like to "open up some doors" for other native healers across Canada, both legally and culturally but would like to see charlatans and bad medicine men "weeded out".

Field Research: Background Information

Field Research was conducted from June to August 1986 on the Sucker Creek Reserve in northern Alberta. I resided in the home of Russell Willier, his wife Yvonne, and their two small children. I assisted Willier on many projects that he was involved in during the summer and spent a great deal of time with the healer in a variety of situations. The fundamental technique used to elicit data was unstructured interviewing in the form of sustained, "student-teacher" dialogue which was largely informal. Initially, a tape recorder was used and/or notes were taken, but these techniques interfered with data collection and later caused more serious problems. Mr. Willier believed tape recording and note taking hampered

my ability to learn and would deter real understanding of
what he was attempting to impart, so I stopped using these
devices for the most part. I did, however, write down
brief reminders on a small notepad, which were expanded
upon when time permitted.

Most of my real breakthroughs occurred after working hard
for twelve or more hours and then beginning a conversation
with Mr. Willier at the kitchen table when the family had
gone to bed. These conversations would last until early
in the morning, at which time I would try to convert what
I had learned into field notes.

Formal situations did arise, as when my supervisor, David
Young, came to visit for an extended period. During this
occasion it was not a problem to use the tape recorder and
I also had an opportunity to benefit from the dialogue
between Willier and Young. In addition to my own notes
and tapes, I had access to information dating back to Dr.
Young's first involvement with Willier. These data
include tape recorded interviews, videotapes, photographs,
and notes relating to Willier's cooperation with the
Psoriasis Research Project.

Since the inception of the original hide tanning project
in 1984, the role that Dr. Young and the research team

(including Lise Swartz, a fellow graduate student in
anthropology, and myself) have played in Willier's life
has been a complex one. There have been many events that
occurred during this period that are a result of our
involvement and that may or may not have occurred
otherwise. For example, the Psoriasis Research Project
has generated a considerable amount of attention in
various media including newspaper articles and television
and radio reports. As a consequence of the project and
events that are directly or indirectly related to our
research, Mr. Willier has been exposed to a number of
situations that could be interpreted as "breaking with
tradition".

Willier's views concerning his initial introduction to Dr.
Young and the subsequent developments of our research with
him seem to be that the meeting was "pre-destined", at
least in the sense that his mission in life is clear to
him and that if our research team hadn't materialized
someone else would have. Cooperation with our research
team is part of his general plan of challenging the
system. In return for sharing information with us, the
research team has assisted Willier whenever possible. How
much of an impact we have made is impossible to know, and
whether our influence ultimately will be positive or
negative, only time will tell. An informal agreement

seems to have been reached that each party should mutually
benefit from the relationship, and that the interests of
the team and of Willier remain compatible and mutually
understood as much as is possible. As the results of
involvement of our research team are complex, more will be
said on this topic throughout the chapter.

The way in which I personally became involved in working
with Mr. Willier, the fieldwork process itself, and the
period that has transpired from initial fiedwork to the
actual writing up of the thesis is also complex. I now
turn to an account of the context of these events.

My association with Willier evolved gradually during the
course of informal involvment in the Psoriasis Research
Project. Throughout my last year as an undergraduate, I
was kept informed of events relating to the project by
Lisa Swartz, who was directly involved in the project from
its inception (Swartz 1986), and by Dr. Young, who was my
honors thesis advisor. The following summer, I was able
to meet Willier for the first time during the course of a
camping trip to the Lesser Slave Lake area, in which he
allowed members of the research team and interested
parties to document some of the herbs he collects in this
region to be used in his medicine. I was also able to
participate in recorded talks with Willier that occurred

around the campfire during the evenings. These
conversations were unstructured and the subjects covered
diverse.

One of the purposes of the talks, in addition to eliciting
information pertaining to Willier's beliefs and medical
repertoire, was to give myself and Carl Wolgien, another
student, some practical experience in doing
anthropological fieldwork. The following Christmas
vacation break, a friend and I visited the Williers for
several days, during which time the medicine man explained
the cursing system to me in much greater detail, including
the use of several accompanying diagrams. My only
previous fieldwork experience consisted of a 10-day pilot
project which was used to formulate questions for an
honors thesis on alcohol abuse (Ingram 1985).

During my fourth year as an undergraduate I had indicated
to Dr. Young my interest in working with Mr. Willier as
part of my graduate training. Dr. Young agreed to be my
supervisor, and early in the 1985-86 winter term we put
together a research proposal to the Alberta Heritage
Foundation For Medical Research. This process was
significant because it formulated research interests that
radically differed from the present emphasis.

The proposed research was designed to examine and document the efficacy of traditional Cree medicine practices in the treatment of psoriasis. Results of fieldwork were to complement and expand upon the data from Psoriasis Research Project, which involved the treatment of Caucasian patients, by collecting comparatitive data on the healer's methods when treating patients from his own culture in his own setting. Field work was also to provide for the chemical isolation of the active ingredient(s) in herbs used in the treatment process. Specifically, the purpose of fieldwork was to:

(1) systematically document the treatment process, including method and frequency of medicinal applications,

(2) collect samples of herbs at different times of the year for subsequent botanical identification and chemical analysis in order to ascertain whether chemical properties vary according to season,

(3) observe whether herbal combinations are prepared in the same way each time so that necessary allowances can be made in determining the chemical composition of herbal medicines.

Fortunately the above proposal was not funded for I would

have been committed to a course of action that was not overly compatible with my interests and areas of expertise and that I would not have been able to operationalize. I was successful in obtaining a research grant from the Boreal Institute of Northern Studies, based on a similar research design, but which allowed me to alter my research design as needed.

While I intended to carry out the original research design, I became much more interested in learning as much as possible about the beliefs surrounding Mr. Willier's medicine. As it turned out, no native psoriatic patients came for treatment during the course of my visit. If they had it is very questionable whether I would have been allowed to observe treatment. I found out rather early that native patients seeking various forms of treatment from Willier were, generally, reluctant to allow any kind of documentation of the treatment process, so I did not persist in trying to obtain permission.

It is now apparent that the original research goals were formulated to meet what we thought should satisfy the "scientific" requirments of a funding agency, such as the Heritage Foundation For Medical Research. It was hoped that I would be able to learn something about Willier's beliefs in addition to these more scientific pursuits.

After it became obvious that I could not pursue the
original research objective, I did not know what I would
be concentrating on for a thesis topic. I approached the
fieldwork situation with a desire to learn as much as
possible about Willier's medicine and to try to record
"everything", at least to begin with.

Attempting unsuccessfully to recuperate from the last year
of the honors program, I had procrastinated as long as
possible before setting out to begin research. I arrived
at the Willier household somewhat "burnt out" emotionally
and physically, bringing with me what turned out to be a
lot of expendable items, such as camera equipment,
borrowed and newly purchased for the purpose of
documenting native psoriatic patients. This equipment was
stored, and never used again.

I was invited to stay in the Willier's guest bedroom,
where I remained throughout the fieldwork season. On
hindsight, not establishing an independent residence,
seems a major error on my part (more will be said on this
later in the thesis). As I wished the Williers to benefit
as much as possible from my presence, a reasonable payment
was agreed upon for room and board and a very informal
contract negotiated in terms of consultant fees and plans
for assisting Willier in his work. As it turned out, I

was able to assist Willier in the many projects he
undertook during the summer months.

The conditions under which I entered the fieldwork
situation were, I think, much more spontaneous than if I
had cast myself only in the role of ethnographer. Being
allowed to accompany Willier in a wide variety of
situations as he conducted his daily business was to me a
very fortunate development. Finding myself in a novel
situation, however, and facing the burden of playing the
role of first-time ethnographer, I felt, at times,
ridiculously self-conscious. Over a period of time I
perceived my presence to be more accepted in the Willier
family. My status as a guest become much less formal
until it seemed, more often than not, perfectly natural to
be there.

I was informed by Willier soon after arriving that he
would be teaching me about his medicine. He assured me
that I would learn a little each day but that some days it
would seem that I wasn't learning anything at all. This
wouldn't be the case if I had patience, Willier told me.
The more I learned about Willier's medical system, the
more I became interested in his beliefs concerning "bad
medicine" and "cursing". The obvious importance that
these beliefs held in relation to many areas of Willier's

life was reflected in the way our conversions would always return to this theme after other subjects had begun to wane.

It may be obvious from the above discussion that I did not explicitly set out to do research based on a hermeneutic framework. This initial lack of a framework has, I believe, both advantages and disadvantages. While I did not consider details regarding the context of the fieldwork process from a well-thought out perspective while gathering data, I did have some previous course work exposure to the works of Gadamer, Husserl, and some of the modern existentialist philosophers. Only since returning from fieldwork have I been able to ground myself more thoroughly in hermenuetic and phenomenological approaches within the social sciences. I was, however, acutely aware of my own feelings and thoughts in regard to what was experienced. I had been advised during an undergraduate seminar to always keep a private fieldwork journal in which interpretations of a more personal nature are allowable. Unfortunately, this advice was not taken and the rigors of hard physical work combined with the responsibility of gathering research material at the same time led to an eventual compromise whereby my field notes took on a form consisting of both fieldwork data and personal diary.

There was little time in the field to reinterpret data
systematically, and I was usually too tired at the end of
the day to find the time. Consequently, my interpretation
of events occurred without a great deal of consultation
with the fieldnotes. The sessions that were recorded on
tape were not transcribed until much later.

The problems that resulted from the somewhat unorganized
nature in which I approached the task of doing ethnography
will become apparent later in the discussion. I thought I
was doing a good job initially, by recording "everything",
whether it seemed relevant or not at the time. The lack
of a well-defined research question contributed to the
idea that I must not miss anything because what seemed to
be of no import could very well be critical at a later
date. In this way I was to break the cardinal rule of
keeping personal thoughts and information that might be
deemed confidential separate from my fieldnotes. That
Russell and Yvonne Willier would want to read my
fieldnotes had not occurred to me.

Shortly after arriving, I obtained permission from the
Williers to live in the old house on their property.
During my spare time I cleaned up the old house and
prepared to move out of the Willier's spare bedroom. This

move never took place. I grew more and more comfortable
staying where I was. Rather than risk some initial
loneliness in establishing a more independent situation,
and as nothing was said to me, I procrastinated until it
was apparent that I had never seriously intended to move
in the first place. Dr. Young had warned me that the
Williers never refuse anyone their hospitality and that
their open-hearted policy must sometimes lead to the
problem of lack of privacy as guests seem to be
continually arriving for one reason or another. I
subconsciously chose to ignore this advice as well.

On hindsight, my preunderstandings before becoming
acquainted with Mr. Willier precluded any possibility of
what has been termed supernatural phenomena. I believed
myself to be an "absolute atheist", something I did not
wish to make known to the medicine man, as I thought the
"anthropological imagination" would allow me to deal with
any belief I might encounter, alien from my own. In other
words, it is now clear that I considered it possible to
understand Willier's beliefs without having to alter my
own significantly. I have since come to realize that the
position of absolute atheism is probably indefensible
intellectually, and in my case, not particularily
beneficial in terms of a workable relationship that each
person attempts to establish in the face of the

existential paradox of being human. My opinions have
therefore changed from a position of absolute atheism to
one of agnostism, a transition that is, for me at least,
quite radical. Willier seems to have a tolerant viewpoint
in regard to non-natives seeking exposure to native
religion. In a sweatlodge ceremony that Dr. Young and I
attended, Willier related a message from the spirits to
the effect that I wanted to believe, but because of my
upbringing in another culture my skepticism was to be
expected. This message was related in a way that did not
attempt to impose something on me that I was not ready to
accept. In fact, Willier's philosophy implies that before
a person is ready, nothing is going to happen anyway, so
why try to force the issue?

Since revising my opinions somewhat as a result of the
fieldwork experience, I regret that I wasn't able to be
more "open-minded" to what Willier was attempting to
impart to me. There is no way now to determine what new
doors might have been opened to me had my
preunderstandings been more compatible with native
religion, although Willier did remark after reading tne
fieldnotes that I had done a "good job". As all of the
ethnographic material was gathered in English it is also
impossible to determine what the results would have been
had Willier's native tongue, Cree, been used as the medium

of dialogue.

Personality differences between the ethnographer and Willier became problematic as the field season progressed. It is safe to say that we do things in very different ways. Whereas Willier had no patience with delaying action in such matters as work, and would much prefer to jump right in and get the task accomplished, I was prone to first having to think things out. These personality differences influenced the ways in which data were collected. Looking back, I think a large part of the problem may have been due to my perception regarding the necessity of playing the role of ethnographer all the time. For example, I would at times be angry at Willier for his perceived lack of sensitivity to my underlying self image. In other words, I felt at times that I couln't be "myself" in Willier's presence. I sometimes resented the role I had taken on very strongly, and experienced great displeasure over the "phoneyness" of the way I perceived myself to be acting at times. At other times, when really in a funk, I would attach the blame for my unhappiness on Willier and felt that I wasn't getting any new material - and consequently considered myself to be overworked and exploited. I am finally able to find some humor in such behaviour when re-reading my notes, but I did not think it so funny at the time.

Inevitably, when I felt I could not bear it any longer,
Willier would relate to me something that would open up an
entire new dimension of understanding. His timing was
uncanny, and it does not stretch my imagination too far to
consider the possibility that Willier was aware of my
quirks in behaviour and that the whole affair was a test.
The prediction that there would be times when I would
think I was not learning anything new, but really would
be, was borne out in the extreme in my case.

The sorts of personal differences that I have mentioned
have a way of becoming exaggerated under field conditions.
There reached a point in my visit that I believed my
presence to be the cause of some potentially serious
conflicts. These feelings came to a head one night after
an eventful day that included a sweatlodge and interaction
with many different visitors. Dr. Young had just departed
for Edmonton after a week-long visit, and Willier was
getting ready to set out on a trip to British Columbia to
doctor a new patient. I was to accompany him. The time
was 1:00 in the morning and we were not to sleep again for
a total of 43 hours. Everyone had gone to bed and Willier
and myself were sitting around the kitchen table having
tea. I felt the time opportune to present to Willier a
pouch of tobacco that I had been saving for such an

occasion.

I strongly believed, at this time, that I had seriously
jeopardized my relationship with the Williers by virtue of
some of my mood swings and behavior which had included
periodic drinking binges in an attempt to compensate for
the long periods when I wasn't able to "be myself". I was
amazed and enormously relieved to find that my perceptions
were over-exaggerated, as Willier, after receiving the
tobacco and my self-doubts, informed me that he had been
aware of our differences in personality and comportment
all along. He told me not to worry and that "I had helped
out more than I could know".

The initial difficulties that occurred when I attempted to
"record everything" through constant note taking and
requests to record conversations on tape have been
mentioned. More must be said on this subject. Because of
Willier's seeming displeasure at the way I approached his
teachings, I learned very quickly to let the conversations
develop naturally. I didn't try to steer the conversation
because the real breakthroughs for me would occur at
Willier's initiation, when he believed I was ready or when
he was "in the mood" to tell me something of import. The
times when I would play the role of ethnographer and ask
questions because this is what I thought I should be doing

did not bring satisfactory results. In spite of playing
this role, the most important talks took place
spontaneously, at least on my part, and during such times
I would become so engrossed in what Willier was telling me
that the role playing would disappear and the little voice
in the back of my head saying "ask this" or "remember
that" would be silenced.

I did not, therefore, persist in probing and was content
to try to direct the conversations as unobtrusively as
possible. I did not want to prejudice Willier's replies
to what I wanted to hear, and at the same time I did not
want to irritate him by asking "dumb questions". So I
felt at times that I should not continue to ask Willier
the same kinds of questions over and over again even
though I would sometimes not fully understand what he was
conveying to me. I didn't want him to think me ignorant.
The consequence of this approach is that he would
sometimes seem to assume that I knew a lot more of what he
was telling me than may have been the case.

This situation became painfully obvious when trying to
piece together the transcripts and fieldnotes on my
return. In retrospect, I wish I would have questioned
Willier at crucial points, in which, for example, I would
cut him off in the conversation or ask an irrelevent

question that would wipe out any chance of a more detailed answer. It is extremely embarrassing, as any novice anthropologist discovers when listening to or reading transcripts, to find oneself oblivious to opportune moments or interrupting a line of thought which could potentially have led to a new area of insight.

Why I finally came to choose cursing beliefs as a thesis topic, and an organization-of-diversity framework for interpretation needs comment. During Dr. Young's visit to Sucker Creek he was able to read over some of my fieldnotes and hear about new material that Willier had related to me. We also had the opportunity to discuss various thesis topics that I had been considering. After reading my fieldnotes and thinking over my comments, Dr. Young came back the next day with some counter-suggestions that were to me quite disturbing, at least to begin with. As I mentioned, I had wanted to inquire into the entire belief system underlying Willier's medical repertoire.

Dr. Young, who has had ample experience with student ambitions to take on research topics of vast proportions or to write the consummate thesis, with little heed to delineating a central research question, pointed out the impracticality of what I was proposing, which I must admit, took a long time for me to accept. On the other

hand, what he did propose and what eventually was agreed upon by all the parties involved was to undertake the writing of a book that would be more suitable to the scope of the data that our research team had accumulated (Young, Ingram, and Swartz n.d.a., in press).

This decision still left the problem of what to consider for the thesis. It was not decided until a long time after returning from my stay with the Williers that I would concentrate on Willier's beliefs concerning the cursing system. After many talks with Dr. Young, and having had the benefit of taking a number of his courses that are directly or indirectly related to the way in which the thesis has evolved, I wanted to approach the cursing system in a way that would be in opposition to the anthropological literature that reaches such a level of abstraction that any account of real people and their everyday lives is virtually non-existent.

To avoid abstract anthropological discourse and at the same time to do "good science" became the major challenge for me. In the process, I chose to explore a hermeneutic perspective in conjunction with an organization-of-diversity framework, as I see the two approaches as being mutually compatible in terms of resolving some of the above difficulties. Whether the

results of this orientation constitute an "adequate descriptive comment" for the material to be interpreted is left to the reader to decide.

The Cursing System

This chapter is based on a major objective of the thesis: to present the beliefs pertaining to "cursing" of a practising Woods Cree healer. Such an "insider" account, as Watson and Watson-Frank (1985:46) point out, however, is necessarily an "interpretation of an interpretation of an interpretation" (1985:46). This means that the process of understanding is predicated upon Willier's interpretation of his medicine and culture as he imparts these views to me. I interpret and translate these views in the process of writing field notes. Based on my field notes, I interpret these data further during the actual writing up of the thesis. Ultimately, it is hoped that the results of interpretation will be congruous with Willier's own conceptualizations. The first question, then, is as follows: how does Willier conceptualize the domain of cursing in relation to the queries and feedback on the part of the ethnographer? The presentation of some aspects of Russell Willier's account of the Woods Cree cursing system endeavours to clarify "the conditions in which understanding takes place" (Gadamer 1975:263).

Upon first arriving at Willier's home at the beginning of
the fieldwork season, I noticed that at night before going
to bed he would walk around the house holding a smoking
piece of fungus. He would carefully stop and wave the
burning incense around the edges of all the windows and
doors in the house, praying in Cree. When I asked about
the purpose of his behavior, Russell explained that he was
"smoking the windows" because he had recently had a run of
bad luck involving events surrounding one of his former
patients, whom we will refer to as Joe, who had just died.

Willier had treated Joe four years ago for a back problem
and he had gotten better, but now he had become seriously
ill. Joe had gone to a few other medicine men for help
without improving before coming to see Willier once more.
Willier took one look at him and knew "the curse was too
strong". In other words Willier realized that he could be
of no help at this stage. Joe could barely walk, and
different parts of his body would periodically swell up.
Willier knew of a medicine man in Montana who could
possibly deal with the severity of the case.

Joe accompanied Willier to Montana where he undertook two
days of sweats and treatment by the other medicine man.
Joe appeared to get better; however, at a specific point

in the return trip he felt something "hit". His condition
worsened once more. Willier drove Joe down to Montana a
second time for further treatment. Again Joe appeared to
get better, and upon arriving home, Willier left some tea
with him that was prepared by the medicine man from
Montana. Two hours later Willier received a telephone
call from Joe's relatives informing him that Joe had been
taken to hospital with a brain hemorrhage. Joe had told
Willier that day that he felt O.K. but had complained of a
small headache at the back of his neck. He later died in
the hospital.

Joe had informed Willier that he had been to see all kinds
of doctors and they had all said there was absolutely
nothing wrong with him. Willier concludes that the curse
"worked its way up", eventually leading to the brain
hemorrhage. After these events had transpired, Willier
received word from the Montana medicine man warning him of
the possibility of a cursing network or circle being
directed at him and that he should take precautions. In
response Willier told me he had established an invisible
circle of power around the entire house. As we have seen,
he would also purify the inside of the house each night.

Willier interpreted this threat of a curse as stemming
from the fact that a "few bad guys" were mad at him at

this time. A person from the place where Joe was "hit" on the return trip from Montana spends his time travelling around hiring himself out to people who want to curse other people. This person is very powerful according to Willier. He doesn't heal but has the backing of seven legitimate healers. Willier had taken Joe to Montana to get the curse reversed but the bad medicine man, with the backing of the others, proved too strong. So the curse was returned once more, this time killing Joe. Because Willier was involved he perceived that he was in some danger; hence the precautions.

When Willier was a young men, starting out on the healing path, he had occasion to visit a medicine man who he thought could help him gain knowledge about his newly-acquired medicine bundle. The other medicine man mistakenly believed Willier had come to enlist his services in order to send out a curse. The man brought Willier inside his house where he had something tied in a cloth bundle. When he opened this bundle there were about 16 different kinds of herbs inside. The medicine man told Willier, "My boy, if you want to get this person, what you see represents the best of my knowledge [referring to the herbs]. I can send these out anytime you want, anywhere you want him to be hit." The medicine man then proceeded to wave some burning incense about a foot over the top of

the herbs. The herbs lifted up and hovered above the cloth. Willier explains that the herbs were "waiting to go" at the medicine man's command. The medicine man also had in his possession what Willier considered to be a radioactive substance such as uranium that he prayed to and brought close to the herbs before they began to levitate. If Willier had actually come to this person to hire his services as a bad medicine man, the arrangement would have cost anywhere from $2,000 to $4,000 depending on what kind of a curse was sought. This particular medicine man, because he was extremely powerful, was not worried when he discovered Willier had not come to hire his services.

Willier explains another form of curse that bad medicine men use, one that does not involve the use of herbs. This involves what is called a spiritual attack. In this case a bad medicine man will enlist the help of the bad spirits to carry out a curse. Willier explains that sometimes the victim of a curse will experience a glimpse of a shadowy figure out of the corner of an eye which upon recognition, disappears immediately. This is what Willier refers to as a shadow spirit. A shadow spirit is instructed to stay close to the intended victim until an opportune moment arrives when the person is at his or her most vulnerable. For example, the shadow spirit may be instructed to attack

when the person is drunk. The bad medicine man will know
his victim's vulnerabilities in advance and will instruct
the bad spirit accordingly.

The threat of being cursed has been important in Willier's
life and in his work as a medicine man. He has always
struggled to overcome the dangers that accompany the role
of medicine man. He emphasizes that the real intent of
bad medicine men is to kill people. Willier has managed
to avoid bad medicine and the attempt to inflict
misfortune. It has not been an easy struggle. The early
years of his career as a healer can be seen as a constant
battle against malevolent forces. The period from 1980 to
1985 was the most difficult time for Willier, but he
believes that bad medicine men are "easing off now". They
are not attempting to send out curses as much these days
because Willier has been able to withstand them and has
persevered. He says: "I stood my ground. They don't try
much anymore." Yet recent events, including the death of
his father, may have significantly changed the situation.

Russell Willier, in his attempt to revitalize native
medicine and culture, has faced adversity and conflict.
As mentioned previously, Willier is aware of the possible
risks he is facing. Knowing the risks involved, and
having to overcome the serious consequences of

"challenging the system", will be the ultimate test of the healer's commitment to bring native medicine out in the open. Since the beginning of Willier's involvement with our research team, several of Willier's relatives and close friends have died. Recently, his father died of a heart attack while Willier was in Edmonton. Soon afterwards his mother was involved in a car accident, sustaining injuries that led to life-threatening complications. A series of such tragic events has resulted in what an outsider might interpret as a "life-crisis situation" that Willier is presently facing.

Willier indicates that what is in progress at this moment is a "hell of a war". There are various people, he believes, who have hired the services of different bad medicine men to direct curses against him and his relatives. Two of Willier's brothers have lost important political positions, due to what Willier considers to be a direct influence of bad medicine whereby people in positions of authority have been influenced to perceive Willier's brothers in a negative light. At the same time, the Willier family has formed a corporation to undertake construction of an office building off the reserve that they intend to lease out to a local band. There have been many recent events that convince Willier that the efforts of the family corporation are also being thwarted by bad

medicine. This attack is "out of pure jealousy",
according to Russell.

The most tragic event to date, the death of Willier's
father, is now believed to be due to a curse. Willier's
father had been in extremely good health for his age. One
day he experienced a pain resembling a needle being
stabbed in his shoulder joint. This pain occurred several
days before his heart attack. A week prior to this,
Willier's mother experienced a similar needle-like pain in
the thigh. Willier doctored his mother with seemingly
successful results. Upon hindsight Willier believes the
pain was transferred from his mother to the shoulder of
his father the following week. This stabbing pain now
moved around to various points in the body. His father
was unable to sleep at night because the pain was so
intense. Willier administered the same medicinal
combination to his father as he had given to his mother,
as his mother's pain had completely disappeared upon
treatment.- His father also felt well again after drinking
Willier's herbal medicine. On the day that Willier left
for Edmonton, he visited with his father until after lunch
and his father was in a joking mood and feeling fine.
Willier, understandably, believed he had eliminated the
effects of the curse. His father had discontinued taking
the herbal solution but the stabbing pain was completely

gone so Willier left for Edmonton.

Willier now believes the curse, which was probably herbal in origin, had only laid dormant. The next attack hit his father's heart directly, and was fatal. The heart attack occurred so suddenly that the doctor later told Willier that his father had "died before he hit the ground".

Willier knows who is responsible for having this curse sent. He also knows the details of this person's actions in the past and explains that he "must now deal with the Great Spirit". This person had been paying a great deal of money to have either Russell or one of his family hit. The payments had been initiated five to seven years previously but nothing of real consequence had happened prior to the death of Willier's father. The family-based corporation was finally off the ground. Its office building was well underway and financial prospects were looking good. The person who had been paying the bad medicine man all these years to keep Willier and his family down apparently went to the bad medicine man asking how this unsatisfactory situation could continue to exist. At this time a deal involving a fatal curse was negotiated.

The bad medicine man who inflicted the fatal curse on

Willier's father is the same person involved in the curse that killed Joe. He has been kept informed of Willier's activities and those close to him by the person who had hired his services. Other bad medicine men are also out to harm Willier but this particular bad medicine man is the most powerful. Willier meditated and consulted the good spirits to determine the identity of the medicine man who killed his father. Willier explains that he was able to see this person's spirit, and it "was pure evil".

After the death of his father, Willier temporarily stopped all healing activities. Because he was no longer doctoring anyone, two former patients of Willier (who were brothers) went to see the same medicine man who had killed Willier's father. Willier was very upset because he had cautioned his former patients about seeing this person, warning them that his (Willier's) protection would not be effective if they persisted in going.

Approximately a month later the daughter of one of the brothers died. She had been at a party the previous night and was found dead in her bed the following day. Two days before her death her parents had heard the girl crying in her room at night. They went to her room to check on her, but she was not in bed. There was no one in the room.

At this point Willier believes that her parents should
have taken action. He interprets this event as meaning
that the girl's spirit had become separated from her body
with the result that her spirit was lost. Willier views
the girl's death as resulting from the bad medicine man
sending out a curse to another medicine man. This curse
was sent back, indirectly hitting one of the bad medicine
man's followers. In other words, the curse (which was
initially unrelated to the two brothers and the girl) was
returned, hitting the girl instead of the bad medicine man
himself. The logic of returning a curse will be outlined
in detail in the next section.

After these events had transpired, the two brothers
returned to Willier, requesting that Willier send a curse
to this bad medicine man. Willier was caught in a bind.
While he was forbidden to send a curse if he wanted to
retain healing power, he strongly believed he must take
action. What was decided upon was the following. Willier
and the two brothers resolved to go on a vision quest to
fast and pray for four days, seeking a solution to their
dilemma from the Great Spirit. There could be two
possible outcomes, Willier predicted. The first is that
the spirit helpers would instruct them to do nothing as
the spirit helpers themselves would take the necessary
action. The second is that Willier and the two brothers

would receive instructions from the spirits as to a positive course of action. This would not be the same as sending a curse on one's own initiative.

Before an understanding of the cursing system is possible, something must be made known of Willier's larger cosmological system. This is a subject that has been related to the research team over a long period of time and in many different contexts.

Locus of Power

The Great Spirit is the source of all power. Power is distributed hierarchically among the spirit helpers. Of these, the primary elemental spirits such as fire, thunder, wind, and water are the most powerful. These are termed the Grandfather spirits. There are also the spirits of animals, some of which are more powerful than others, and the spirits of plants, birds, fish, insects, and rocks. Finally, there are the spirits of people who have died.

While Willier possesses knowledge of the spirit world, he does not profess to understand, nor think it possible for any mortal to understand, how the world was created. Not until the following conversation occurred during the

course of a late night journey to British Columbia did I
realize this to be the case. I had considered the area of
creation of the world to be a large gap in our knowledge
of Willier's cosmology. I believed that, as with certain
subjects such as personal interaction with the spirit
realm, Willier was reluctant to discuss these matters. I
had come to the mistaken conclusion that I wasn't asking
the right kinds of questions to elicit the response I felt
to be there. We were discussing the similarities between
Roman Catholicism and Native religion. Willier referred
to how the Indian religion was not recorded in written
form. This comment led to my asking specifically about
Christian views on creation, in the hopes of getting
Willier to talk about his viewpoint. He mentioned an
Ojibwa medicine man who had agreed to be interviewed by
Dr. Young and Lisa Swartz, and who had gone on at great
length about the medicine circle in relation to various
creation myths. No amount of prompting could get Willier
to discuss the subject I was most interested in at this
time:

Willier: But you see, I don't go that far. I don't try
to find out. I don't have any intention of finding out
how the world got started. I'll be wasting my time trying
to find that out. After I die, that's one of the things
I'll go find out.

While all power is derived from the Great Spirit, the

distinction between good and bad power is complex. The

dialogue that immediately follows is transcribed from what
is a key interview in terms of acquiring new information
in several areas that we were unclear about at the time.
The interview took place during Dr. Young's visit to the
Sucker Creek Reserve. Willier, Dr. Young, his 15 year-old
son Chris, and I were riding from Willier's home to his
haylands in his pickup truck:

Question: How about the spirits of people who have died?
They're not Grandfather spirits, are they?

Willier: Those ones are limited to do so much. Most of
them can be used for bad real fast. You can turn it
around and use it for bad right away.

Q: But you can't do that with the Grandfather spirits,
eh?

Willier: It's pretty hard. What will happen if you try
to use a Grandfather spirit for bad, is that eventually
you won't be able to heal. It'll go away then; the other
one you can hold.

Q: The Grandfather spirits?

Willier: The dead ones.

Q: The dead ones you can hold?

Willier: Yeah. You wouldn't be able to hold a
Grandfather spirit because you've stepped into the bad.
If you ask them for bad stuff, they'll help you for awhile
but they will pull out and then you end up with nothing.

Q: So you can hold the spirit of dead people for bad?

Willier: You can also use them for good. If you start
off and stay good with them, you can't ask for a better
... You've got good stuff right there from the beginning,
if you can stay on that track.

Q: So if the Grandfather spirits pull out. Say if a guy
goes bad. Where does he get his power from afterwards?

Willier: He'll get it from the other, the dead, down below there.

Q: From down below?

Willier: Yeah.

Q: Bad spirits, huh?

Willier: Yeah, the bad spirits will step in.

Q: And the bad spirits are from dead people?

Willier: No. There's the good and the bad but that's one of the turning points. Say if a person started using the good spirits out of greed, he'll end up being too greedy. Then he'll start asking the good spirits for different things. If they're going to back off then he'll have to go use the other side. Once you get into the bad side, you won't be able to heal. You'll still have the wind up here but its not the same spirit as appeared when helping you before.

Q: But it's still the wind?

Willier: It'll be another wind. From the dark side.

Q: So do all the Grandfather spirits have two sides?

Willier: Yeah. The good and the bad.

Q: The good wind and the bad wind. The good fire and the bad fire?

Willier: Right. There's a split.

Q: Is it the same with people who have died? There's the good and the bad?

Willier: Right.

From the above, it would seem that there exists separate or parallel systems of good and bad power. Whether there exists separate and mutually exclusive sources of power, or whether the same power is being used for both good and bad purposes is not clear. If all power flows ultimately

from the Great Spirit, the notion that there exists
separate systems of good and bad power that can be tapped
becomes problematic. After many discussions, this is one
area that has remained ambiguous for the research team.
The implications of this ambiguity, whether real or
perceived, will be further examined in the latter part of
the chapter.

Control of Power

The way in which power is put to use by people is
complicated, and it must be made clear that a division
between the locus of power and the way in which power is
controlled is artificially imposed for the purposes of
clarity. The previous dialogue suggests that it is
extremely difficult to talk in terms of one without
reference to the other. It is hoped that through a
discussion of the various ways in which power is
accumulated, counteracted, and neutralized, a fuller
understanding of both locus and control of power will be
realized.

Man cannot access the Great Spirit directly, but must
always communicate through spirit helpers who act as
intermediaries. The following quote is from a
conversation on the trip to British Columbia. I had asked

whether there was any possibility of man circumventing the spirit helpers to approach the Great Spirit directly:

Willier: The funny part is that the Indian puts himself away from God because he thinks he is not worthy. He doesn't put himself up there. He never did. He never will. He doesn't want to feel he can communicate with the Great Spirit because he is not worthy. According to him, the blades of the grass are worth more to the Great Spirit than he is. How is he going to go up there and bypass everything else that's going on up there? It's impossible for him to do that.

Willier emphasizes that when people talk about a powerful medicine man what they are talking about is not the man himself but his ability to communicate with the spirit world. Thus Willier is the first to admit that he is just an ordinary person, that healing power does not reside in the man himself. The above is consistent with Willier's response to our questions during the drive to his haylands:

Q: So do the plants have their own spirits?

Willier: Yeah.

Q: And will they appear as humans?

Willier: No. Sometimes. Maybe only half.

Q: The top half?

Willier: Yeah. Just to talk to you but you won't see the rest.

Q: But are those spirits of the plants Grandfather spirits too?

Willier: Yeah. That's where you get the real power from. If you use that plant and if you ask that spirit plant to

go ask the Great Spirit for help then it will work, the power will come directly through. [Usually the spirits of animals appear as animals, but plant spirits can appear as people. Whether they are considered more powerful than animal spirits is doubtful; however, this interpretation needs to be confirmed by Willier. Whether animal spirits can appear as people is also not clear.]

The picture becomes complicated when the notion of direct

control is introduced. Later on in the same conversation,

the ambivalent nature of power and how it is used became

apparent. We had been asking Willier to clarify the

different categories of spirits in terms of varying degree

of power:

Willier: You see, the spirits are not ... You can be out there for quite awhile and they won't talk to you. They might watch you. When you are really capable for them to talk to you, that's when they will talk to you. Now the difference with a dead spirits is ... I always say it's on the dangerous side. Really, a person shouldn't monkey around with the dead. It's not their place of work. Let's say you've got somebody and he's already earned in his lifetime to be in the foggy area. How are you going to get that guy to work for you on the good side? He's thinking about rest, right?

Q: So you wouldn't know for sure. It's more unpredictable huh?

Willier: Its pretty unpredictable but with these other spirits [the good spirits], if you're doing right, the power can't come from the bad side.

Q: What if you knew someone was a great healer, a great medicine man, that was dead? Like Moostoos. Could you go to his spirit and ask for help?

Willier: I don't know, I think in the long run I'd probably be more powerful than him.

Q: So you haven't done that in the past then, asked for Moostoos to help you?

Willier: Oh, but we do ask for his assistance to a

certain extent but not to hold that spirit. He has to be with you constantly for one thing. Its a little different than what I'm doing.

Q: But when you ask for assistance say in the sweatlodge or something?

Willier: Right. Then he'll come in and move back out. You don't control them. But if you want to control them, you are in a little different area altogether.

Q: And that's when it would be unpredictable?

Willier: Well, it has to come right from your heart. Because, like I said, if greed overtakes you, or jealousness, then you are going to drift out, out into the ocean where you can't control your little boat. You have to be dead sure that you can do it.

The nature of direct control will be explored further in the latter part of this chapter. From the dialogue and discussion presented to this point, the intricacy of Willier's beliefs in relation to the spirit realm becomes obvious. The question of whether there exists parallel systems of medicine men who tap into the same source of power, or whether there exists two parallel systems of power, good and bad, will also be further examined. While these issues remain in question, the information presented thus far becomes necessary for a fuller understanding of how good and bad medicine actually function.

The roads to being a good or bad medicine man are distinct, but the idea that power is potentially dangerous is extremely important in what road is actually followed. The discussion of good and bad forms of medicine is

actually a synthesis of the process of understanding that took place over a long period of time, and which at this point is impossible to unravel. The dialogue transcribed above is intended to elucidate what for me took many months to comprehend.

There is a morally and spiritually correct path that a person must follow successfully if he is to have access to healing power. This path is extremely difficult to follow and one is constantly tested along the way. If a medicine man abuses access to power by using it in the fulfillment of impulses stemming from greed, jealousy, or selfishness, healing power is irrevocably lost. Thus to be able to access healing power, a medicine man must always resist these temptations. If one does not resist, a point will be reached at which the bad spirits will replace the former assistance of the good spirits. Then there remains little choice but to follow the bad road.

The next dialogue, between Willier and myself, was recorded during Christmas holidays, 1985. This was the first opportunity for an extended private conversation with Willier. The naivete of the questions posed to Willier during this occasion serve a useful purpose now, as this was the most detailed explanation of the cursing system that was ever related to me:

Willier: There's a lot of temptations out there.
Temptations will come. All kinds of things can happen,
all of a sudden. Maybe not very harsh, but hard enough
for it to hurt your feelings, let's say about your kids.
Tests will come from the Great Spirit, and you really got
to try and buck 'em the right way, because if you don't,
before you know it, you'll be on the bad road.

Both healing power and bad medicine are ultimately linked

to the ability to alter the colours of light that people

emit. Every person has a spirit in them and this spirit

is manifested in light. Certain colours of light are

emitted at different times throughout the life

progression.

Willier: Every human has different lights that come off
them. If you're on a bad luck streak, the animals will
see that. So will the kids, the little ones. They'll be
scared of you. Just by looking at you they can see the
light.

Q: Does the light change?

Willier: The light changes. If you're lucky the light
will change to a different colour where the moose, the
elk, even the kids will like you.

Q: Do you know the different kinds of lights? How they
change?

Willier: Well, this is what I'm trying to tell you. If a
person is unlucky or cursed that light will be there. If
a person walked in here, if he's very unlucky, you'd know
right away...

Q: Does that light also affect a person's health?

Willier: Yes, a lot.

Q: Can people learn to control the light on purpose?

Willier: The way we control the light is when we go to
the sweatlodge. That changes it.

Q: How does it change?

Willier: The colour will change, your luck will start, because you're asking God to change it for you when you go to the sweatlodge.

Q: What colour does it change to?

Willier: To the colour where nobody is scared of you. Kids are nice to you, the dogs won't bite your heels.

Q: But is it an actual colour, like say red or blue?

Willier: Whatever. It might be light blue. Light blue's a good colour and also yellow. Let's just say if I drove around through the bushes up there with a skidoo you could probably see that streak of light facing towards the sky. Same thing. If your light is not very good, and if you are a hunter, the moose will be looking at that light. It's like a skidoo light. It shouldn't be there. If you have a good light that moose will not see you even if he is coming right towards you. There's a big difference. That's why, a long time ago, if an evil medicine man wanted to curse somebody, if he wanted the top hunters, he would starve them.

Q: What does the evil medicine man's light look like?

Willier: He could control that by using herbs for himself and also by giving them to other people like the followers. It's hard to explain about that because ... but if a bad medicine man has quite a few followers, it's pretty hard for him to get hit. His followers will get hit first.

Once a medicine man has broken with the good road he must protect himself by attracting followers. A bad medicine man must create the illusion of having the ability to heal, and thus attract a group of clients, in order to shield himself from other bad medicine men, or bad medicine that is being returned. The followers appear to act as unwitting shields. The healer is responsible for protecting his own circle of followers or patients from

the effects of curses, as well as trying to protect

himself and those closest to him:

Q: How does that work with the followers? Are they like
apprentices to the bad medicine man?

Willier: No. A follower is somebody that comes to you
and has a sort of faith in you. They ask things of you.
If you give them something and if you were the bad guy,
you'd also be making youself an extra follower. They'll
hit that person before they'll hit you. That's why they
have to have people going to them.

Q: I don't understand.

Willier: O.K. I'll try to explain it on paper to you.
The deeper you get into it the more interesting it is, and
a lot of it is complicated. Two or three minutes and then
it'll tie up together as one.

Q: .Is that a good or a bad medicine man? [indicating a
drawing]
Willier: Could be either side.

Q: Either side?

Willier: Alright. Let's just say you've got to be
conc.rned about yourself. Some people start coming to see
you from different places. So you give this guy some and
that guy some protection, or whatever it could be. It
depends on how you do it. Let's just say you give all
these guys protectors, O.K?

Q: What is a protector?

Willier: A protector is something where the bad guys
cannot change your light. If a bad guy cannot change your
light, that's what we call the protector. What it does is
make sure your light does not change, even if somebody
sends something to you. Lets say you give all these guys
protectors. So he's in here [the bad medicine man is
depicted in the center of his followers]. But sometimes
he'll send something out, like bad medicine. That's
returned. When that thing is returned, it can land on any
one of these guys [the followers] but not him [the bad
medicine man]. He's got all these guys hopping around.

Q: But I still don't understand what a protector is. How

does that work?

Willier: A protector is something that will be given to you and you possess it all the time.

Q: Can you see a protector?

Willier: Yeah. You'll have it in a little pouch or something. O.K? You'll keep that. You'll be told to make sure that you put it away if the women have their monthlies. There's certain things you have to do to it. You smoke it, this and that. A protector will help you.

It is not clear whether there are good and bad forms of protectors. It seems that a bad medicine man himself has a tangible protector equivalent to that of a good medicine man, as well as having the protective shield of his followers. In the case of his followers, it is also unclear. It appears that the bad medicine man distributes protectors to his followers in order to deceive them into believing they are a source of good protection. It is not known what their real purpose is. Presumably these protectors would alter a person's light unfavorably in order that he/she would be the recipient of curses returned by a good medicine man, thereby shielding the guilty party.

There is a fine line in the use of good and bad power. The consequences of crossing this line can be dangerous, even fatal. In the case of a good medicine man, the option of returning a curse is not usually selected unless it becomes absolutely necessary. By returning a curse the

consequences are more unpredicable. If the bad medicine responsible for the curse is more powerful than the person returning it there is a risk that the curse will return to the good medicine man or one of his followers and cause misfortune. Or if the curse is sent back successfully it could injure or kill the bad medicine man or hit one of his followers.

Apparently, the position of both bad and good medicine men and their respective followers is precarious in regards to the various circumstances that can arise in a cursing situation. Willier maintains that it is extremely hard to be "hit" if you are adhering to the principles of the right path. He emphasizes that "if what you send out is good then what will come back will also be good", for the good medicine man and his followers. But we have seen that good intentions may not be sufficient, as in the example of returning a curse.

The following excerpt from the trip to British Columbia also illustrates the potential dangers involved when exercizing power.

Q: But at a certain point the good spirits would be more powerful than the bad ones, eh?

Willier: Yeah. Well, there was one Bible story about the man Job. He had a family, ten or twelve kids. He had everything. Then he came down with some kind of disease. God was checking his faith. Took all of his children away

from him. He was down and out and next to nothing. All
his friends came over and told him that maybe he's in the
wrong religion. But he kept his faith that there's a
Great Spirit. He stuck with it. He didn't back off. But
he was having all this bad luck, a streak of terrible
luck, even his health was off. But he stuck with his
religion. If you look at it in the Indian way, we would
say he was cursed. He was overpowered by bad medicine and
that's why he lost out. He crumbled to nothing. He was
crippled. He had no kids. He had nothing, the old guy.
He was challenged and he was beaten. Then he came back.
It was his faith that he stuck with. He got back to about
where he was before. He got kids and everything and then
he died, according to that story. You see, the way we
would look at it is that he got beat by medicine, even
though he was on the right track. He got wiped out.

In the case of a bad medicine man, the consequences of

losing one's followers is also an ambivalent area. In an

excerpt from the Christmas visit, Willier maintains that

there is some degree of choice available:

Q: Is there more chance of a curse coming back to the bad
medicine man if his followers go away and drop their
protection?

Willier: Either he has to quit ... he has to keep on
living, or something.

Q: Can he change?

Willier: He can change, but he'll never be just like you
or me, eh. But he won't be able to doctor, because he
already sent some [bad] stuff out.

During our trip to British Columbia, Willier responded to

a similar vein of questioning in a slightly different way:

Q: Once you lose some of your medicine, can you get it
back again?

Willier: In different ways, because you already know how
it works. Remember I was trying to tell you how some
natives steal other medicine men's stuff? It's very easy

for them to do that because they already know a lot of things.

Q: But what if they wanted to get it back the right way by starting over again. Could they do that?

Willier: No. They can't do that. What I'm trying to say is what's registered up there you can't erase.

Q: Even if you completely changed?

Willier: [Pause] You never know because spirits have kind hearts.

Q: But could a bad medicine man become a good medicine man?

Willier: Most people try to change after they get so far. But if you practice bad medicine so far, when you get so wicked, as soon as you stop you're going to die.

Q: I see. But if you're only in to it so far, is there still a chance or no?

Willier: It's hard for me to say because I was never on that road. But somebody that's already in bad medicine, if they try to stop, they'll have no power. So what's going to happen? It's going to hit them. They're going to be six feet in the ground. [Long pause] That's why I say that as long as they're active they've pretty well got to keep on. They had a choice when they first started. But it's the greed that gets them, the jealousy, things like that, that's what gets them. Any man, not only the Indian.

Cursing as it Relates to Russell Willier's Work as a Medicine Man

Russell Willier is attempting to revitalize native medicine and culture. Mr. Willier "is a good example of a healer who is attempting to preserve native medicine, not by keeping it hidden away as many others have done, but by bringing it into the open and introducing innovations designed to allow native medicine to compete successfully

with western, orthodox medicine" (Young, Ingram, and
Swartz n.d.b). Willier believes that one way to
accomplish his overall objective is to "make native
medicine more accessible to all people by developing a
healing center on his reserve which would be open to both
natives and non-natives" (Young, Ingram, and Swartz
n.d.b). To help realize his ambition of establishing a
healing center Willier has formed a non-profit
organization with the following general objectives:

1. To promote, encourage, and teach Indian culture,
custom, belief, and values;

2. To research the treatment of diseases and ailments
that use traditional Indian remedies;

3. To provide for the treatment and prevention of
diseases and ailments, incorporating traditional Indian
remedies and practices;

4. To experiment with adapting traditional healing
practices and remedies to the modern situation in terms of
professional services and facilities.

Willier's objectives in regard to the healing center can
be summarized. He views the activities of the healing

center as part of a larger goal - the revitalization of native culture so that young people will be motivated to take pride in their heritage and to assume their rightful place in Canadian society. He believes that the problems of native youth and native society as a whole, such as alcohol and drug abuse, suicide, unemployment, and violent death are due to the "cultural gap" created through the wholesale adoption of cultural values and practices from the larger society without having first established a solid grounding in native culture. He sees this "gap" emerging largely because young people have not been exposed to the teachings of their elders. In order to close the gap Mr. Willier believes that native youth must get back on the "Sweetgrass Trail." Mr. Willier maintains that native youth must learn about the Sweetgrass Trail and the Medicine Circle "in order to see in what ways their lives will fall in place as they grow older".

The Sweetgrass Trail is a spiritual, moral, and philosophical system of guidelines for the natural life progression as established through native religious principles. The activities of the healing center will include seminars by elders and different healers to impart the kno ledge that is necessary if one is to successfully follow the Sweetgrass Trail. Willier is hopeful that the programs of the center can be open to a variety of people

who would receive training and return home to initiate
change in their own communities. He also hopes to have
healers go to different reserves and remote regions to
assist local groups in starting their own programs.

A large part of what Willier hopes to accomplish in his
role of medicine man can be situated in the context of a
prophetic vision he received. In this vision Willier
found himself standing before a multitude of Indian people
who were without tongues. As the sole person with a
tongue, Willier was cast in the role of spokesperson for
his people (Young, Ingram, and Swartz n.d.). Willier's
efforts to challenge the system can be seen in terms of
his overall objective of revitalization. He has a
"mission" or central goal in life, one that relates in key
ways to his beliefs surrounding cursing.

Willier believes that there exists a network of bad
medicine men across North America who continually monitor
each other and those who heal. The moment one achieves
success or "sticks up too far", curses will be activated
to bring the person down again, "to level him", in
Willier's words. One of his hopes in talking about
cursing to larger audiences is that bad medicine men will
be exposed and "phonies" will be "weeded out". Willier
emphasizes that the real proof of healing ability can be

seen in the results with patients who have come to be
cured. He firmly believes in bringing native medicine out
into the open again.

In Willier's struggle to avoid the consequences of curses
he has learned how to comport himself in a manner that
makes it difficult for bad medicine men to carry out their
malevolent intentions. Instructed by another medicine man
about how to defend himself, Willier has learned how to
"be unpredictable".

Although a particular spirit helper of Willier may be
known to a bad medicine man, the fact that an animal
spirit may be used for both good and bad purposes can
prevent an evil act from occurring. Willier keeps bad
medicine men guessing as to which road he is on. A bad
medicine man would have to reconsider the situation
carefully before directing a curse at Willier. The
consequences of not maintaining a front of
unpredictability is fatal: "Once they know where you are
going to be, that's it, you're dead". Unpredictability
must be maintained so that "they don't know what you've
got ... if they think you might send out some bad medicine
of your own, they think twice about it".

during the fieldwork season. The great number and variety
of projects initiated by Willier during this time were
begun with a purpose in mind: by keeping your business
extremely dynamic, a bad medicine man cannot get a fix on
what you are actually attempting to accomplish and
therefore cannot know in which direction a curse can be
effectively placed.

Willier believes that there are two ways of becoming
immune to bad medicine. The attainment of a large sum of
money - say $2,000,000 - is one way. This objective is
very difficult to achieve for a native person, Willier
believes, and few have actually passed through this
barrier and become immune to the system. The second way
involves, what may seem to an outsider, a more spiritual
route. By going far enough "in your medicine" a person
can become invulnerable to the effects of curses.

The Shaking Teepee

Willier eventually wants to gain enough access to
spiritual power that he will not be bothered by bad
medicine. For Willier this goal involves attainment of
the Shaking Teepee. The Shaking Teepee (or Shaking Tent)
is one of the most important rites among North American

>... one of the most widely distributed
>religious observances of Native North America,
>extending as it formerly did from eastern
>Washington to Labrador. Other Northern Plains
>tribes, such as the Gros Ventre of Atsina,
>Crow, Assiniboin, Sarsi, Kiowa, Cheyennene,
>Plains Cree, Dakota, Mandan, and possibly
>Arikara and Arapaho shared some form of the
>Shaking Tent rite, which also had been adopted
>by several tribes of the Columbian Plateau.
>The rite is an invocatory one, during which
>the performer is believed to summon with
>appropriate procedures one or more spiritual
>beings by whose assistance he penetrates the
>barriers of time and space (1969:3).

While preparing an elk hide one day, Willier explained the

Shaking Teepee. The teepee can be made out of willow,

spruce, or other materials, depending on what instructions

were given to a person by a spirit helper. Willow

branches are placed in the ground, forming a circle

approximately four feet in diameter. They are then bent

and tied at the top to form an eliptical or egg-shaped

structure. Specially prepared rawhide is placed on top of

the willow framework. Stakes that have been sharpened to

a razor-like edge are placed everywhere inside this

structure. Rattles are strung from top to bottom, either

inside or outside. The person performing the Shaking

Teepee ceremony is securely tied in a blanket outside the

teepee. Participants begin to sing and drum. At a

certain point the person is taken by the spirits and

transported through a small entrance to the inside of the

teepee.

Willier has been considering the attainment of the Shaking
Teepee for over a year. He requires the assistance of
another medicine man during this risky quest. Willier
must do without food and water for four days. The person
assisting stays in a separate camp. During the fast
Willier hopes to receive a vision from the spirit helpers,
whereby the secrets of performing the Shaking Teepee
ceremony are revealed to him. When the spirits come there
is a danger that Willier will want to leave this world and
go "through the doorway" to the spiritual world. The
attraction can be extremely powerful. To safeguard
against this danger, Willier has been instructed to obtain
a special object to be held at all times during the
encounter with the spirit world. He says he will use a
piece of moose rawhide. It will be scraped in such a way
that it will be partially transparent. He will then be
able to look through it and see his family and be reminded
that the spirits are not human, though they sometimes
appear as humans or as entire families. While fasting
Willier must construct a small circle of power around him.
If he is to step outside this circle then "that's it, it's
all over." He will no longer be of this world. All that
will remain will be his dead body.

The medicine man assisting Willier has a crucial role to

play when Willier returns from his fast on the fourth day.
At this time everything must be ready for Willier to
undergo a sweatlodge ceremony. This is a crucial
responsibility, because if something is not done in the
proper manner Willier is vulnerable. As Willier explains,
he will be a different person when he comes back from his
four-day communion with the spiritual world. He will
appear different from his everday self: "The mind floats.
I won't act the same. I won't look the same".
Furthermore, he will not be allowed to speak. If
something does go wrong at this time, Willier can do
nothing to remedy the situation.

The sweatlodge ceremony must be completed before sundown
or there is the possibility that the bad spirits will
appear and that from this time on Willier would have no
other choice but to be a bad medicine man. Were this to
occur, Willier would give no sign of it, as he would not
want anyone to suspect his new role. Willier explained
that the bad spirits enter the person and once inside are
there to stay. This is the same in the case of good
spirits and good medicine. If the person assisting
Willier is not completely trustworthy there is also the
possibility that the person will be able to steal the
powers that have been granted through the spirits once the
Shaking Teepee has been attained.

Clearly, acquiring the Shaking Teepee is difficult and risky, but there are considerable benefits if carried out successfully. A person must be absolutely committed and his heart must be completely in the right place in order to succeed. If Willier is able to attain the Shaking Teepee he will be well on his way to achieving power. For example, when a bad medicine man presently directs a curse at Willier or to someone he is doctoring, all he can do is try to neutralize or return it. A person with the Shaking Teepee has more options available. Such a person is able to do virtually anything he wants with a curse. The person has penetrated the barriers of time and space. Omniscience is conferred. Willier would be able to know in advance if someone is coming to see him for doctoring. He would know what the ailment is, and what time the person is arriving. He would know everything he needs to know about that person. With access to these powers Willier would become immune to the effects of bad medicine. As Willier says, "If I attain the Shaking Teepee, no one will be able to touch me."

Overcoming the System

Russell Willier, in his attempt to fulfill personal
objectives within the framework of the revitalization of

native medicine and culture, has faced adversity and
conflict. How Willier interprets the unfortunate events
described earlier in the chapter is not known. It is not
difficult, however, to imagine the importance that cursing
beliefs hold in such a situation. In terms of the
ambiguity, contradiction, and variability in Willier's
beliefs surrounding cursing, there can be no neat analysis
or conclusion on the part of the analyst. There are not
enough data to do justice to the complexity of the life of
an individual such as Russell Willier, whose beliefs must
be situated in a larger framework that at this time is not
well understood.

If all power ultimately comes from the Great Spirit, how
can there be both good and bad spirits? Indeed, how can
there exist both good and bad medicine? Given Willier's
cosmology, can the difficulties that he is now facing be
interpreted as a test from the spirits (and therefore from
the Great Spirit), or as a curse, or both? A person close
to Willier responded to the above misfortunes by asking
how a good God/Great Spirit can let this kind of thing
happen. In answering this question, the person went on to
say that these events can be explained in terms of what a
medicine man must sacrifice in order to achieve power.
There was no mention of curses. The implication is that
the Great Spirit is directly responsible for Willier's

troubles. Regarding the involvment of our research team with the healer, this person feels that although we might have somehow pushed Willier toward these events, we are not directly responsible. I do not know how Willier views his situation. There are in all likelihood no easy answers for Willier himself.

Other people, including those close to Willier, have questioned the healer's motives. They have questioned whether Willier is genuinely committed to his objectives or seeking personal prestige and/or wealth. Willier has had to deal with the problem of being a medicine man, while at the same time having to be engaged in a number of other different roles, especially that of helping provide for his family. During the course of fieldwork Willier would sometimes comment on how he has to "drop everything" in order to doctor a patient. Often he receives little money or material reward for his efforts. He may spend more than he receives during a trip to doctor someone. I was lucky to be able to accompany Willier on several of these trips, and I have witnessed the satisfaction that the role of medicine man brings to Willier when he is able to help someone. It is easy to see that Willier doctors people for the love of it, and the material consequences of engaging in the role of medicine man are very much in the background.

As to Willier's long-term aspirations, we can only speculate. We have seen that there are two routes involved in becoming immune to bad medicine. We have also seen that avoiding the consequences of cursing is crucial to Willier for his long-term goals. It is clear that Willier has undertaken an ambitious project. Although Willier doctors people at no insignificant expense to himself, he is not satisfied with the role-juggling that he continually faces. He is aware of the financial cost of his spiritual commitment. It would seem at times that Willier is bent on achieving both a spiritual and monetary means of avoiding the consequences of cursing. To an outsider and to people close to Willier, this combined ambition, if correctly interpreted, might seem to contradict what many would perceive a medicine man to be all about. But how might such an ambition look from the "inside"?

Many spiritual leaders around the world have been accused of corruption, greed, and insincerity. This criticism is deserved in some cases, yet there remains the question of whether a spiritual leader himself/herself might see the two routes to accomplishing certain long-term goals, namely, the spiritual and the material, as compatible. The answers to apparent contradictions in belief and

action are not easy to understand.

We have seen how Willier, in attempting to overcome "the system", has to comport himself in such a manner that his adversaries will not know the true nature of his strengths and plans, behavior which is called "being unpredictable". When I first arrived at Willier's home the healer related the story of Joe. Because Willier was physically involved in the situation he perceived that he was in some danger and therefore needed to take precautions. As mentioned, this involved purifying and establishing an invisible circle of power around the house. Willier explained that we were to be very cautious for awhile and aware of potentially dangerous situations, such as handling an axe. Although I did not doubt the sincerity of Willier's precautions, it did not seem very long until they were no longer adhered to. This incident relates to my impression of Willier as being rather impulsive in carrying out his daily affairs. Willier has very definite long-term objectives, but his daily activities seemed to me quite haphazard at the time.

I related to him that I was puzzled by some of his actions. He explained to me that reality was not what it first appeared. He told me about being unpredictable. If I who had been living and working with him for some time,

could not understand, how could his enemies get a grasp of
the real nature of his plans. Again , we have an issue
that does not readily fit into any neat framework of
analysis. Is Willier's belief in being unpredictable
genuine and well-thought out, or is it a means of
rationalization for what may be lack of foresight on his
part? Or is it a combination of both? Were my
perceptions accurate or were they due to cultural and
idiosyncratic differences between Willier and myself?

The Medicine Circle/Sweetgrass Trail:
Attaining the Balance

There can be no hard conclusions reached concerning
apparent ambiguity in Willier's cosmology and in his
behavior relating to cursing beliefs. What follows,
however, represents central concepts for Willier in his
life and in his work as a medicine man. These can provide
us with a different framework for understanding the
difficulties that Willier is facing. The concepts of the
Medicine Circle and the Sweetgrass Trail can provide us
with a model to make sense of inconsistency, variability,
and ambiguity without reducing these factors (which are a
reality in each person's life) to a set of abstractions
that have little to do with everyday life. The following
ideas reflect a rich philosophical, moral, and religious

system.

The Sweetgrass Trail can be thought of in terms of a "tree of life" metaphor. Each person takes a separate pathway through life. This path may or may not converge with that of the central "trunk" of the tree, but the ultimate goal of fulfilling oneself in life can occur only if one is able to arrive at the end of the Sweetgrass Trail. A person can "fall off the trail" at any point along the way, either permanently or temporarily, due to any number of circumstances, both self-made and/or beyond an individual's control. There is no guarantee of successfully reaching the end of the Sweetgrass Trail even if one seems to have followed all of its moral precepts.

The four cardinal directions are central in understanding the concept of the Medicine Circle. Each direction symbolizes a crucial component in a person's life. To follow successfully the Sweetgrass Trail and to close the Medicine Circle, one must bring each segment of one's circle into harmony with the whole. This is what is meant by "following the Sweetgrass Trail". For the majority of people during their lives the circle remains open. Only after a lifetime of successfully following the Sweetgrass Trail is one able to close the circle and attain balance.

To close one's Medicine Circle a person must attain a
balance between the four segments of the whole. These
segments include essential elements for a balanced life,
such as learning a profession (North = Wisdom); planning
for the future (East = Eagle Spirit, farsightedness);
establishing a home and material possessions (South =
Mouse Spirit, the collecter); and building a family (West
= Bear Spirit, family, children, and "developing a good
heart"). There can be any combination of these elements
in a person's life; that is, the Medicine Circle can
encompass the entire range of human diversity and the
human condition, but each part of the circle must be in
harmony with the remaining parts if the circle is to be
closed.

A theoretical example was outlined by Willier as a
possible scenerio of how the four parts of the circle can
be combined. A person who has a trade or profession
(Wisdom), but spends most of his spare time drinking and
"having a good time", will spend money on drink and will
not be able to plan far ahead (Eagle Spirit). This person
probably cannot raise a family (Bear Spirit).
Consequently, the Medicine Circle will remain broken. A
deficiency in one area of the circle will impact on other
areas. The person's lifestyle will eventually create
problems on the job. Willier rhetorically asks what this

person will be like when he is fifty years old. The
answer is this person will be unhappy.

The Medicine Circle and the Sweetgrass Trail, when thought
of in combination, are the same thing. The alternate
colours of light that people emit througout different
stages in their lives have already been mentioned in
connection with the diagnosis of disease stemming both
from curses or occurring naturally. In the context of the
Medicine Circle, a person's light takes on new meaning.
The colour of a person's light will depend on where that
person is in terms of "closing his/her circle".

The Sweetgrass Trail/Medicine Circle concepts provide a
framework for exploring how an individual deals with
variation and inconsistency in everyday life. Every
person has to deal with what he/she would like to happen,
and people conceptualize experience to a high degree in
terms of self-interest. What self-interest means,
however, is not simple. Self-interest must be viewed in
emic terms, that is, from the point of view of the
individual. Therefore , it necessarily involves factors
which cannot be simplified if any real understanding of a
person's motives is to occur. In crude terms, an
individual's actions can be examined from the viewpoint of
the ideal versus the actual. The Sweetgrass

Trail/Medicine Circle gives us an elegant model in which
to situate the discrepencies which inevitably occur
between what people would like to accomplish and the
actualities of everyday life.

What the Sweetgrass Trail and the Medicine Circle
illustrate for us is that although people strive for a
balance in their lives, very few are actually able to
attain it. People attempt both consciously and
unconsiously to integrate their lives and to bring their
actual situation in line with ideal conceptions. In doing
so, there is the inevitability of discrepancy occurring
between the actual and the ideal. How much discrepency is
allowable or manageable? Although the answer depends on
each individual, one may generalize to say that in each
person's life there will occur ambiguity and
inconsistency. This may not become conscious, depending
on the circumstances and on how far apart belief and
action become. At some point, however, the discrepency,
if continued, will become conscious. There is a huge area
here, as Giddens (1986) indicates, for the study of
knowledgeability and symbolism in practical consciousness
and the stability of personality. When discrepancy
between belief and action becomes conscious, a person has
the choice of either doing something to realign the two,
or not, in which case the gap will widen. If a person

cannot realign the actual and the ideal, due to circumstance or choice, he/she will experience discomfort. The circumstances in which an individual comes to make such a choice are going to be complex. Because humans have this choice, however, we have the potential to be adaptive, reasonably healthy human beings.

There can be no simple way to match the "whole" and the parts - culture and the individual - but an organization-of-diversity framework in conjunction with hermenuetic and phenomenological orientations can give us a basis to start to explore these complex issues. In the concluding chapter we examine how one might proceed to bridge the culture/individual equation in a more meaningful way.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

Summary

This thesis has been developed on the premise that the
individual must not be forgotten in anthropology. Two
major issues have been in evidence throughout the thesis.
The first issue is the importance that the individual
holds in anthropological analysis. The first chapter
endeavors to illustrate the role that the concept of the
individual has played in the historical development of
psychological anthropology. This development was provided
as background for an exploration of how the lack of
attention to the individual can begin to be remedied.
Original fieldwork data that was collected by the author
while residing in the home of Russell Willier, a Woods
Cree medicine man, was examined in the second chapter in
order to assess whether the use of a hermeneutic and
phenomenological orientation is able to do justice to the
beliefs of one individual. What became apparent at this
point in the thesis was the difficulty of understanding
even a small portion of an individual's belief system as
these beliefs relate to the person's everyday life. It
became obvious that the relationship of the individual to
the larger culture cannot be oversimplified.

Herein lies a rich and largely unexplored source of data
for the development of more flexible and realistic
theories to account for the diverse ways in which human
beings are able to organize their lives in accordance with
the world around them.

Where does one begin to look for such theories? It
becomes apparent that the most interesting and
sophisticated theories emerge from the very people that
anthropologists have always "studied". It is just that
anthropologists caught up in imitating the natural
sciences (what Dennis Tedlock (1983:321-338) refers to as
the "analogical" tradition within anthropology) have just
not paid heed. Tedlock compares the analogical tradition
with an alternative anthropological mode - the dialogic:

> A dialogical anthropology would be a talking
> across, alternately, which is something we all
> do in the field if we are not purely natural
> scientists. There is no reason this dialogue
> must stop when we leave the field ... The
> armchair dialogue I have in mind here involves
> the interpretation of the discourse recorded
> while in the field. Again, this armchair
> dialogue is something we all do, listening,
> puzzling, questioning, and, as it were,
> talking back. It still partakes of the
> specific nature of the social sciences; it is
> still dialogical anthropology. But so far, we
> do it mainly **prior** to publication, rather than
> **in** publication (1983:323-324).

In contrast to the notion of dialogue, the analogic
tradition in anthropology:

> ... involves the replacement of one discourse
> with another. It is claimed that this new
> discourse, however far removed it may seem to
> be, is equivalent or proportionate, in a
> quasi-mathematical sense, to the previous
> discourse. **Ana-logos** in Greek, literally
> means "talking above," "talking beyond," or
> "talking later," as contrasted with the
> talking back and forth of dialogue. The
> dialogue is a continuing process and itself
> illustrates process and change; the analogue,
> on the other hand, is a product, a result
> (1983:324).

This thesis has endevoured to develop a basis for
overcoming the lack of attention to the individual. This
has led naturally towards a dialogic position.
Accordingly, a second major issue emerged in the thesis -
the importance of taking emic meaning seriously. We have
seen the importance that cursing beliefs play in Russell
Willier's life. We have seen the problem that an outside
analyst has in attempting to interpret beliefs such as
cursing which are so intrinsically different from the
framework of discourse that Western science and in turn,
the discipline of anthropology, has established
historically.

What follows is an exploration of how the two major issues
of the thesis can be reconciled. This leads us to an an
examination of what has been termed a "key cultural
institution". The concept of a key cultural institution
will be outlined in order to provide a starting point for

the development of a methodological perspective which
would accommodate the individual in anthropological
fieldwork and would, at the same time, allow the scope of
analysis to move outward without overly distorting the
emic perspective.

Key Cultural Institutions

The concept of a key cultural institution (developed by D.
Young as a framework for his classes on psychological
anthropology) entails a concrete situation in which actors
enter the scene with a variety of personalities, goals,
strategies, and world views, and through interaction, a
dynamic process unfolds. What provides a situation with
structure is the set of rules and expectations that govern
interaction. By examining the dynamic processes of
negotiation and the social construction of reality that
occurs within a structured, concrete situation, the
complexities of interaction become amenable to
investigation.

Social situations are not all equal in terms of the
possibilities of acting out or pursuing individual
motivations. A key cultural institution can be likened to
a game which allows the actors to engage in both
idiosyncratic and conventional pursuits. But the

game-like character of the institution must be camouflaged
and an atmosphere of seriousness maintained if the
institution is to continue to meet individual needs.
Examples of key cultural institutions include the Potlatch
of the Northwest Coast, various institutions of witchcraft
and sorcery world-wide, the Kula exchange of Melanesia,
and both ritual and modern warfare.

Despite the fact that a key cultural institution approach
makes research more manageable by limiting investigation
to concrete situations, there are still three levels of
analysis to consider: (a) motivational (b) structural (c)
interactional. This would require a team effort, and in
all likelihood, would be costly. In the following section
of the thesis, what will be outlined is a possible
middle-ground approach to interaction that would reduce
this complexity while at the same time allowing for the
range of individual variation in any life-situation.

Dialogic Research

It will be argued that the strategy of "network analysis",
which was developed in the 1950s and 1960s and gained a
degree of popularity in anthropology in the 1970s, could
provide a workable framework in which to interpret a
limited concrete situation. As Barnes (1972:1) indicates,

the concept of social network has been applied in myriad
ways. Here, I wish to concentrate on what has been termed
a "personal network" (Mitchell 1971:13). The analysis of
a personal network attempts to map the activities of
individuals through the full spectrum of social
relationships. As such, analyses of personal networks
have been partly successful. Network analyses have
suffered, though, in ways that this thesis has endeavoured
to make explicit. By becoming caught up in the imitation
of the "hard sciences", and emphasizing the collection of
quantitative data, network analyses have gotten further
and further away from the study of actual individuals.

By concentrating on one individual as a focal point in the
process of understanding, and from there expanding this
process outward to include a number of individuals who are
interacting in an on-going and meaningful fashion with a
key actor, a **qualitatively-oriented** network model could
provide a middle road to understanding the dynamic
processes that unfold during the course of interaction.
In this way, the anthropologist can choose to take a
committed stance and by virtue of entering the scene
himself/herself become very much engaged in an
"organization of diversity" approach both at the
individual level and at the level of interaction between
key players in the life of the main actor. By adapting a

dialogic approach one would be taking steps to operationalizing an organization of diversity analysis.

What is a dialogic approach? After wrestling with the misguided notion of forming a definition of what would constitute a dialogic approach, I now realize that the concept of dialogue, upon which the term is predicated (Tedlock 1983:321-338), necessarily transcends any attempt merely to define. Definition, in this case, belongs to the realm of the analogical tradition within anthropology. A dialogic approach defies definition, precisely because it is just that - a dialogue. A dialogue does not necessarily stop once the participants cease to "speak". A dialogue can, and often does, continue for a lifetime. Where a dialogue begins and where it may lead is worked out in the course of the dialogue itself. Instead, what I want to argue is that by adopting an explicitly hermeneutic and phenomonological orientation, and by entering a research situation with the willingness to involve individuals as full participants in an on-going research process, an anthropologist necessarily becomes more deeply committed to the people with whom he or she is working. It is not possible to take a "neutral" position if one is seriously committed to doing research in a dialogic mode. One expects an entirely new situation to emerge as a result of the intrinsically dialogic nature of

the fieldwork enterprise. By entering the fieldwork situation expecting to bring about change and at the same time expecting to be changed in the process, a researcher does not merely become a "conduit" for an inside account of reality. The ramifications of doing research in this manner (which some have always done but just haven't been too clear about it) has abundant potential for a trend towards long-term applied anthropological discourse.

It becomes clear that flexibility is paramount in this type of research. As in my personal experience of working with Russell Willier, a researcher must be above all, flexible. While this was not a strategy that was clear to me on entering the research experience, it is one that I now see as essential. Ultimately, the needs of the people with whom anthropologists work must guide the direction that the research process takes. It also becomes clear that the interests and abilities, the personalities and motivations of all that are involved in the research process are in themselves a large part of what can be considered to be important "scientific" data.

I do not have the answers for how the divergent needs of those involved in this kind of research can be accommodated. I feel confident in predicting that many mistakes will be made as they certainly have in the past.

Mistakes , however, rather than being something that the anthropologist must secretly carry "to the grave" can become the catalyst for meaningful change within the social sciences. How many times have we wished that a person in a position of authority and trust such as a political leader would display his/her humanity and admit a mistake? If this does happen the person making the mistake may gain considerable "political mileage" as a result. In retrospect, it may be due in large part to the fact that we have been seen to make mistakes ourselves and are indeed human, that Russell Willier, over time, has been as candid as he is in conveying information to us.

Unfortunately, the structure of the academic system and of granting agencies is not at present conducive to the kind of "open-ended" research I am proposing. Ways must be found, at least initially, to get around the kind of rigidity that is inherent in the present system. As in Russell Willier's claim that the best possible indication of healing ability is in the results rather than in the claims that are established beforehand, a change in the bureaucratic structure of our discipline and in the discipline itself may be effected, predicated on the new "results" of fieldwork in the largest sense of the term. What I am getting at here is the hypocrisy inherent within the funding system in the human sciences. Presently, a

research applicant must formulate rigid "scientific" goals
(in the best analogical tradition) in order to satisfy
funding requirments which he/she is then usually not able
to operationalize, especially in research involving human
beings. If these goals are carried out the results can
only be unsatisfying when viewed from a dialogic
perspective. If granting agencies were to fund
dialogically-oriented projects, the results, in the
long-term, could potentially alter the academic system of
the human sciences as a whole.

Dialogic Analyis: The Problem of Objectification

Foucault (1969) has written that it may be impossible to
change the discourse of an established discipline from
within. I believe, however, that the entrenched way of
thinking within a disipline such as anthropology can, and
will, be allowed to change. The remainder of this thesis
is an exploration of how this change can come about.

The two major themes of the thesis, namely, the importance
of the individual in anthropological research and the
related issue of the necessity of taking the emic point of
view seriously have been outlined above. What becomes
apparent at this point in the thesis is that while a
dialogic analysis can accommodate these two issues to a

certain degree it is possible to advance this line of
thinking one step further. To do so, I must depart from
normal academic practice and relate events and feelings of
a highly personal nature. Only in this way will my
conclusion be comprehensible.

Writing this thesis has been a painful experience. Each
time I began to represent my thoughts on paper or re-read
my fieldnotes or imagine the totality that this thesis
represents I would be forced to relive the anguish that
resulted from the bad feelings I caused towards the end of
my stay with the Williers. The exact nature of the source
of these bad feelings is not really relevant to anyone not
directly involved, except to say they resulted from a
disclosure in my journal of information concerning the
Williers' personal relationship, information that Russell
revealed to me in confidence. What is relevant, I
believe, are some of the conclusions that I have arrived
at as a result of being forced to confront painful
realities of a personal nature. It is hoped that these
conclusions relate to what constitutes the task of doing
anthropology. What is at issue here is the problem of
"objectification". How does one begin to write about the
life or lives of other people? This is an essential
problem that I have been consciously and unconsciously
attempting to come to grips with ever since causing these

hard feelings.

When writing this chapter I had a conversation with my girlfriend, who is a Cree Indian and has been in many ways influential in what I am about to say. We were discussing the problems we have in communicating and in living with each other. I was attempting to explain "what I was really like" in order that she should better understand me.

In doing so I was to return to a theme that I have struggled with for most of my adult life. At an early age I began to recognize instinctively that something somehow wasn't quite right in what I saw around me. I cannot recapture these feelings exactly but what I began to realize was that adults seemed to be engaged in some sort of incomprehensible game or performance that I experienced as a constant source of puzzlement and amusement. A good friend and I would head downtown in Lloydminster, a "typical" small prairie town situated on the Alberta/Saskatchewan border. Saturday afternoons in the summertime, we would walk down the main street of the town, the Meridian, which happens to coincide with the provincial border. We would observe all the strange and wonderful characters approaching us along the sidewalk. We would begin to laugh for seemingly no reason at all at

one person or another. I do not really know what was so funny or what set off this reaction but once we began there was no stopping us. As a couple of eight year old boys, we were allowed to get away with it. People may have observed two small boys giggling uncontrollably on the sidewalk, but I don't think they would have guessed what the object of our fit of laughter was about.

What was it about? My friend and I didn't sit down and analyze it at the time. All I know is that being allowed to be a kid growing up on the prairies was a wonderful experience in many ways. This was to change drastically over the years.

I regretted for years the fact that I was no longer allowed to have such experiences and had to somehow fit in with the people I observed around me who had adjusted to the mysterious transformation from child to adulthood with seemingly much more ease than I. Or did they? This is the theme that I am referring to in the only way I know how: the process of becoming an "adult" and what happens to people compared to when they were younger and perhaps not so burdened with playing in accordance with the "rules of the game".

Everyone starts out with the ability to experience the

world around them in a more or less direct manner,
infinitely more direct than what is to come later in life.
In my anthropology honors thesis, Drinking as a Coping
Response: An Alternate Explanation For Alcohol Abuse
(Ingram 1985), much of what I wrote was a result of direct
experience. My argument was as follows:

> Central to the intangible requirments for the
> healthy functioning of an individual is the
> need for adequate self-expression ... adequate
> satisfaction of this need is crucial to an
> individual's ability to function adaptively in
> life. The denial of essential "intangibles"
> such as the need for self-expression may lead
> some persons to search for a compensatory or
> coping behavior such as drinking (1985:14).

Further:

> The capacity to respond adaptively which is
> essential to a person's well being may be
> inextricably linked with normal reward
> functioning in the limbic area of the brain
> (1985:16).

Evidence indicating that the limbic system (which is held
to be largely responsible for the emotions) is essential
for the overall functioning of the central nervous system
and consequently every part of the human system was
presented. Consequently, it was suggested that affect or
emotion pervades virtually all aspects of behavior
(Damasio and Van Hoesen 1983). Therefore people who need
to drink are manipulating a highly non-specific drug in

ways whereby the actual experiences while drinking can provide them with what they consider impossible to attain during everyday life.

I intellectually understood this but seemed to forget about it. A friend who read my thesis remarked that while he had enjoyed it, he did not see anything of Grant Ingram in it. I was pleased by this. I had written something that could possibly pass as being scientific. Various events now conspire to keep reminding me of what I was trying to work out for myself in the thesis.

In an undergraduate course on introductory primatology it was explained that the first researchers on non-human primates, when realizing the extrordinary intelligence displayed by animals such as chimpanzees, attempted to teach these animals to communicate through the use of the English language. For years this was a serious endeavor, with the result that the chimps were able to manage quite poorly (in the minds of those who had worked so hard with them) four or five words resembling their English counterparts. It was later discovered that the unsuccessful results may be due to the fact that the vocal apparatus of many non-human primate species are directly connected to the limbic system in the brain (Myers 1978). Vocalizing for a chimp is of a highly different order than

conversing is for a human being. By this, I do not wish
to imply that chimps or other animal species do not have
the capability for abstract reasoning. I believe they do.
What I am indicating in a metaphorical and a literal sense
is the long evolutionary process whereby humans have
sacrificed the direct linkage between their "vocal cords"
and their ability to communicate with the world around
them. We have followed a path (at least in the "West")
where it becomes increasingly possible to "understand
things" without involving the emotions in any significant
way. In fact, this is what academic training seems to be
all about. What I am suggesting is that such a
development, rather than leading us closer to the the
world around us, leads us further away. By constructing a
world where emotions are not to be displayed, but "kept
under control", Western society, and in turn Western
science, have, I believe, set serious limitations on what
can be both experienced and understood.

I keep having to rediscover what a performance life
usually is for me. Consequently, I have always wondered
what it is like for others. This is what no doubt
attracted me to anthropology. Based on Anthony Wallace's
organization-of-diversity model it has been argued that
modern life in a North American setting results not in
fragmented personalities but the ability of people to

adapt to the necessity of highly specific and variable situations through the adoption of multiple roles (Britton 1973:197-99). These roles are in essence part of the "self" but do not require the individual to reveal personal motivation, or much in the way of what he/she is "really like".

Rarely, in everyday life, do we get a glimpse beneath the superficial level on which people interact with others in public. Consequently, this "culture" is what we are most familiar with but at the same time we are unaware of its influence upon us. Only with a few people are we able to let down our guard.

A professor related one day how kinship is the most single important factor in anthropology. He was trying to change our minds regarding kinship, as he knew that the study of kinship is usually repellent to students encountering it for the first time. Kinship is usually presented by way of complicated flow charts with triangles and circles featuring abstract categories of people. In other words, there exists a great gap for students who are attempting to equate such abstactions to real living people like themselves. This professor went on to say that in societies in which kinship is of paramount importance there is no real question of who you are in terms of role,

expectation and overall comportment. People learn to live with you the way you are and you learn to live with them.

In North America where kinship is often secondary and is certainly not the main factor in everyday interaction, one must, he said, constantly "re-invent" oneself in each new situation. This has resulted in what I have termed the "conspiracy of politeness". People do not need to know who you are or what you are really like. They have to know only that you will be able to anticipate the rules of interaction. People, therefore, learn to adjust but in a manner quite different from societies in which kinship is still the dominant factor.

People adjust by learning to protect what I will call the "real" or the "core" self. This is the self that after childhood is glimpsed only rarely, but which gives a clue to the fact that you really exist and that life is worthwile. I now suspect that most people are able to achieve "adequate reward stimulation" from their everyday interactions to the extent that they are able to to drop the defenses. Yet I also suspect that everyone makes compromises in order to attain this achievment. The "adult games" that I perceived as a child are a necessity of life as one gets older. Many adjust to this with apparent ease. Others, like myself, do not. What I am

proposing in a metaphorical sense , is that the realignment of my "vocal cords", the way I communicate with the world, with my core self, has relevance for the discipline of anthropology.

How then do anthropologists begin to consider the insider's point of view in a serious manner? I now firmly believe that this involves a commitment on the part of the analyst to be willing to be changed in significant ways as a result of the fieldwork process. Unfortunately, I did not go into the fieldwork situation with such a commitment, and as a consequence, I have had to learn the hard way. It is ironic, but the unfortunate incident that I created has been a catalyst for wide-ranging changes in my life. I feel confident that had this incident not occurred I would have remained unwilling to consider seriously Willier's point of view with regard to cursing. It is also ironic, but this incident has brought home to me, in ways that reading a book never could, the absurdity of Cartesian objectivism within the human sciences. I believe that it is possible to begin to understand another's point of view, but at the same time, I am more aware of the deep commitment that this undertaking requires. I am also aware that the communication of this process of understanding to others need not become overly distorted by the limitations of what has constituted

acceptable discourse within the social sciences.

Taking the Emic Perspective Seriously

How then does one go about taking the emic perspective seriously in anthropological interpretation? Most anthropological theories of witchcraft and sorcery have involved attempts to make broad generalizations concerning the structure and function that such institutions have in societies. The idea behind such analyses is that sorcery or witchcraft is due to competition among different groups or within groups themselves. The techniques used in witchcraft and sorcery are held to be a reflection of conventional fears and frustrations in a society. Such practices are then said to serve various "functions" for the entire society. Generally, the institutions of witchcraft and sorcery are seen to be social mechanisms of control or leveling devices whose function is to keep people from breaking established cultural rules. Such practices are said to provide a means of displacing emotional frustrations that build up as a result of day to day conflicts. The functions of witchcraft and sorcery are also seen to be harmful in the sense of causing disruption and divisivness in a society; not for the effects that the people themselves perceive as a result of such activity.

We have seen that there is some support for "leveling devices" from the point of view of Willier himself. Within a functionalist argument however, the reasons that the analyst proposes for phenomena such as witchcraft and sorcery are often held to exert an influence without the people themseves being aware of this influence. The "function" of what people do when they engage in behavior such as witchcraft and sorcery is viewed as an unintended consequence of their combined actions.

The problem with analyses that use a functionalist approach is that the full reality of the emic or insider's point of view is ignored or not taken seriously. In effect, the analyst is saying that while what you are telling me is interesting, I know the "real" reasons for why you do what you do. In doing so, the functionalist approach usually avoids dealing directly with the problem. If you don't accept the emic point of view then all you are able to do is come up with other explanations for behavior that the people being studied are unaware of, but are, nevertheless "true". It is not too hard to see the arrogance of such approaches and how by dealing with people who have beliefs other than our own in this fashion, the anthropologist has often done an injustice to the very people he/she is attempting to understand.

Rather than helping to break down stereotypes of the kind
that result from misunderstanding between different groups
of people, the anthropologist has more often than not,
helped to create or reinforce these very stereotypes.

Let us depart from a functionalist-type argument and
consider the emic point of view seriously. In brief, we
must face the issue squarely and ask not "how does the
cursing system work?" but "what is a curse?" Whether or
not there is a lack of concern in Willier's medicine with
process or what is actually happening to produce evidence
of illness is an intriguing problem. Can this lack of
concern possibly be due to our biased Western perception
of a radically different medical system? Or is Willier
truly not concerned with what Western medicine would call
pathology or disease process? It would seem that Willier
is very aware of what we would call pathological processes
involving germs or viruses and the like. We have seen
this awareness in the example of Joe, who had been cursed
with fatal results. However, in Willier's view, illness
is not just due to germs or viruses. In some instances,
illness may be due to bad medicine in the form of curses.

When we ask why certain people tend to attract curses we
may be getting closer to the heart of the matter. What
happens in such cases is that these people have

transgressed their society's moral values. By being
greedy or overly ambitious or individualistic, by being
selfish or envious of others or by "sticking out too far",
such people become out of balance with themselves and the
people around them. For this imbalance, they suffer guilt
at the minimum. A healer's role is to restore this
balance. This is accomplished by a series of rituals to
eliminate the imbalance. A healer is able to objectify a
person's problem and by doing so a person can then begin
to deal with it in a positive way. By placing the cause
of illness and misfortune in the realm of curses, a healer
then takes measures to neutralize or deflect the curse.
Healing for Willier means being able to help a person get
rid of a curse. Doing so, this often means restoring
balance in the person himself, his family, and in his
relationship with the larger community.

A related issue is why Russell Willier has been directly
or indirectly the object of so many curses. Is this due
to Willier's charismatic personality? Or is it due to the
way in which Willier has deliberately made himself
conspicuous by virtue of "challenging the system"? From
an outsider perspective the obvious question arises. Is
the caution that Willier displays a result of "cultural
paranoia" and therefore something that an outsider should
not attempt to understand until the dynamics of the larger

group is better understood? As we can see this question
gets us into much broader sociological issues.

So far, as the discerning reader may have gathered, I have
managed to avoid the question of whether curses and bad
medicine have a basis in reality. Some researchers have
begun to take seriously the material basis for sorcery and
witchcraft. Such analyses have usually dealt with this
phenomenon by suggesting the influence of psychological
factors in bringing about physical changes in a person who
has been a victim of bad medicine. Someone who dies after
bad medicine is directed towards him/her is said to have
been so stricken by fear of having been the object of a
witch or a bad medicine man that his or her autonomic
nervous system goes into a state of shock leading to death
(Lex 1974). There are well-documented cases of deaths
which have occurred in a surprisingly short period of time
(Eastwell 1982). This kind of explanation, however, does
not do justice to the fact that in Willier's view, a
person does not need to know that they have been cursed.

Although the evidence on the material basis of cursing
phenomena and the actual means of transmission of a curse
is extremely limited at this point, it is becoming
increasingly apparent that there is much that scientific
knowledge cannot presently account for. The following

material on the Chinese concept of "Qi" (vital force) is
intended not as an explanation of cursing phenomena from
another outsider perspective but as a hermeneutic devise
to facilitate understanding of Willier's belief system in
relation to cursing for a reader not familiar with such
thinking:

> Qi means that which differentiates life from
> death, animate from inanimate. To live is to
> have Qi in every part of your body. To die is
> to be a body without Qi. For health to be
> maintained, there must be a balance of Qi,
> neither too much or too little. The origins
> of Qi are three. There is "original Qi," that
> portion of Qi transmitted from your parents to
> you. It is unique, yours from the moment of
> conception. But it is finite, and over time
> is used up little by little. The second
> source of Qi is "nutritional Qi," meaning Qi
> extracted from the food you eat. It is
> constantly being utilized and replenished.
> The third is "air Qi," the Qi extracted from
> the air you breathe. It too, is used and
> replenished ... All of human pathology can be
> understood in terms of balances and
> imbalances. A balanced state corresponds to
> health. Any excess or deficiency corresponds
> to illness (Eisenberg 1985:43-44).

A fourth source of Qi can be said to originate from the
earth itself. Qi-Gong masters train for years to be able
to project externally this force or vital energy that is
believed to reside in all things. They have demonstrated
their ability to effect change in both animate and
seemingly inanimate objects. Through manipulation of Qi
energy, demonstrations have shown that Qi-Gong masters are
able to move objects without touching them, effect

movement in paralyzed patients and experimentally alter
bacterial growth patterns under laboratory conditions
(Eisenberg 1985:213-214). In the latter example, a
Qi-Gong master was able to emit what is considered to
"lethal Qi" and thereby significantly lower the number of
bacteria growing in test tubes. Similarily, by emitting
health-promoting Qi the master effected a dramatic
increase of bacterial growth.

Although Qi has not to date been measured or sysematically
documented, the Chinese are currently engaged in
cooperative research with other countries to attempt to
measure Qi force through such sophisticated instruments as
nuclear magnetic resonance scanners, CAT-scanners, and
other electro-magnetic devices. It is clear that
phenomena that we do not presently understand must not be
ruled out on the grounds that all such matters are
"superstition" nor explained merely by concepts such as
the power of suggestion.

Concepts such as Qi force may partially explain aspects of
Willier's model of cursing. However, these explanations
do not do justice to everything that Russell has talked
about in regard to curses and cursing.

What must be emphasized at this point is that there may

be, and probably are, many levels of reality co-existent within the natural world - levels that modern science has only begun to explore (Capra 1976,1983; Bateson and Bateson 1987). If life is viewed in these terms it is not necessary to conceive of the order of things as being mutually exclusive. The distinctions between the natural order vs. the supernatural realm, religious phenomena vs. secular or scientific belief are beginning to disappear on many fronts. Many so-far unexplained phenomena including so-called "supernatural" events, may indeed have a material basis.

Beliefs, similar to those that have been outlined in this thesis, about cursing have been present in virtually every society on earth for hundreds, if not thousands of years. It is becoming increasingly obvious that far from being "primitive" or "superstitious" the belief systems of other peoples around the globe have much to teach the so-called "modern world".

It is the position of this thesis that if one can examine the emic model in a detailed and sophisticated enough manner, approaches such as functionalism and other distortive "outsider" evaluations are no longer required. The reader may ask if I am advocating a position of absolute relativism. I don't believe that this is the

case. If the position that there are no "facts" without interpretation is pushed to the extreme, there remains little left to hang on to. If there are no facts, then what? Many academic disciplines including anthropology are being affected by new forms of thinking. No one can be sure where this will lead. We have seen that outsider perspectives in anthropology have impinged negatively on indigenous peoples around the world. We have also seen that this is no longer acceptable. If no final understanding is in sight, and a God's eye view not possible, what then will "replace" entrenched ways of thinking and writing? As Dennis Tedlock (1983:332-33) reminds us:

> ... It is not that the dialogical path requires the general abandonment of existing methodology, or even of the eliciting frame in particular - after all, even the natives have methods, as the ethnomethodologists have it. And it is not the case the the dialogue is itself a method, in the sense that it might supplant "other" or "previous" methods. A method is a "means to an end" and tends to be seen as a "necessary but temporary evil." The dialogue is not a method but a mode, a mode of discourse within which there may be methodological moments, on either side, and within which methods number among the possible subjects under discussion, both in field and armchair. In the writings of a dialogical anthropology, methods will be seen in their full range from happy accidents to utter disaster.

This thesis has been largely experimental. I do not know how successful my attempt to provide a dialogic framework

for understanding the emic point of view has been. I have come to the realization that if such a framework is to work, the anthropologist must continually work at communicating the process of understanding. This, I believe, involves becoming more than a social scientist. It involves becoming a writer. Academic formulas are no longer sufficient to communicate what we have learned in the field. If, however, one is willing to consider another's point of view seriously, no longer will it be necessary to represent the other's beliefs as "primitive", "unscientific", or "irrational". In this way, a long-overdue dialogue can be initiated between indigenous peoples and Western science.

REFERENCES

Aberle, D.F.
   1967   The Psychosocial Analysis of a Hopi Life
           History. In Personalities and Cultures.
           R. Hunt (ed.). New York:Natural History Press.

Asad, T. (ed.)
   1973   Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter.
           London:Ithica Press.

Barnes, J.A.
   1972   Networks in Social Anthropology. Reading
           Mass:Addison-Wesley Modules in Anthropology.

Bateson, G., and M.C. Bateson
   1987   Angels Fear: Towards an Epistemology of the
           Sacred. New York:Macmillan.

Bennedict, R.F.
   [1934] Patterns of Culture. New York:Mentor.
   1946

Boas, F.
   [1940] Race, Language and Culture. New York:
   1966   Macmillan.

Bock, P.K.
   1980   Continuities in Psychological Anthropology.
           San Francisco:W.H. Freeman.

   1988   Rethinking Psychological Anthropology:
           Continuity and Change in the Study of Human
           Action. New York:W.H. Freeman.

Boyer, L.B.
   1978   The Mutual Influences between Anthropology and
           Psychoanalysis. Journal of Psychological
           Anthropology:265-296.

Britton, A.
   1973   Meanings and Situations. London:Routledge.

133

Capra, F.
 [1976] The Tao of Physics.   New York:Bantam Books.
 1984

 1983   The Turning Point: Science, Society and the
         Rising Culture.   New York:Bantam Books.

Clifford, J.
 1988   The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-
         Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art.
         Cambridge:Harvard University Press.

Clifford, J. and M. Marcus (eds.)
 1986   Writing Culture.   Berkeley:University of
         California Press.

Crapanzano, V.
 1977   The Writing of Ethnography. Dialectical
         Anthropology 2(2):69-73.

Dollard, J.
 [1935] Criteria for the Life History, with Analysis
 1949   Of Six Notable Documents.   New York:P. Smith.

Du Bois, C.
 1944   The People of Alor: A Social-Psychological
         Study of an East Indian Island.   Minneapolis:
         The University of Minnesota Press.

 1961   The People of Alor.   2 vols
         New York:Harper and Row.

Dwyer, K.
 1977   On the Dialogic of Fieldwork. Dialectical
         Anthropology 2(2):143-151.

 1979   The Dialogic of Ethnology. Dialectical
         Anthropology 4(3):205-224.

 1982   Moroccan Dialogues. Baltimore:John Hopkins
         University Press.

Eastwell, H.D.
   1982   Voodoo Death and the Mechanism for Dispatch of
             the Dying in East Arnhem, Australia. _American_
             Anthropologist 84(1):5-17.

Eisenberg, D. with T.L. Wright
   [1985]   _Encounters with Qi: Exploring Chinese_
   1987   _Medicine. New York:Penguin Books._

Evans-Prichard, E.E.
   1940   _The Nuer_. Oxford:Oxford University Press.

Fabian, J.
   1983   _Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes_
             its Object. New York:Columbia University
             Press.

Foucault, M.
   1980   _Power/Knowledge_. New York:Pantheon.

Freud, S.
   [1913]   _Totem and Taboo_. **Standard Edition** 13:
   1955   1-161. London:Hogarth Press.

   [1927]   _The Future of an Illusion_. **Standard Edition**
   1961   21:5-56. London:Hogarth Press.

   [1930]   _Civilization and its Discontents_. **Standard**
   1961   **Edition** 21:64-145. London:Hogarth Press.

   [1939]   _Moses and Monotheism_. **Standard Edition** 23:
   1964   7-137. London:Hogarth Press.

Gadamer, H.
   1975   _Truth and Method_. London:Sheed and Ward.

Geertz, C.
   1973   _The Interpretation of Cultures_. New York:
             Basic Books.

1976   From the Native's Point of View: On the Nature
        of Anthropological Understanding. In Meaning
        in Anthropology. Basso, K. and H. Selby
        (eds.). Albuquerque:University of New Mexico
        Press.

Giddens, A.
   1986   Action, Subjectivity, and the Constitution of
           Meaning. Social Research 53(3).:529-545.

Gusdorf, G.
   1980   Conditions and Limits of Autobiography. In
           Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and
           Cultural. Olney, J. (ed.). Princeton:
           University Press:28-48.

Heidegger, M
   1962   Being and Time. New York:Harper and Row.

Ingram, G.
   1985   Drinking as a Coping Response: An Alternative
           Explanation for Alcohol Abuse. An unpublished
           Honor's thesis. Department of Anthropology,
           The University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.

Kardiner, A. with R. Linton
   1939   The Individual and His Society: The
           Psychodynamics of Primitive Social
           Organization. New York:Columbia University
           Press.

Kardiner, A. with R. Linton, C. Du Bois and J. West
   1945   The Psychological Frontiers of Society.
           New York:Columbia University Press.

Kluckhohn, C.
   1944   The Influence of Freud on Anthropology in
           America during the First One Hundred Years.
           In One Hundred Years of American Psychiatry.
           Hall, G., G. Zilboorg and H. Bunker (eds.).
           New York:Columbia University Press:589-617.

1945 The Personal Document in Anthropological
   Science. In The Use of Personal Documents
   in History, Anthropology, and Sociology.
   Gottschalk L., C. Kluckhohn, and R. Angell
   (eds.). Social Science Research Council
   Bulletin 53. New York:The Council:78-173.

1957 The Impact of Freud on Anthropology. In Freud
   in Contemporary Culture. Galdston, I. (ed.).
   New York:International Universities Press:66-72.

La Barre, W.
 1958 The Influence of Freud on Anthropology.
   American Imago 14:275-328.

Langness, L.L.
 1965 The Life History in Anthropological Science.
   New York:Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Langness, L.L. and G. Frank
 1981 Lives: An Anthropological Approach to
   Biography. Novato, California:Chandler and
   Sharp.

Lex, B.W.
 1974 Voodoo Death: New Thoughts on an Old
   Explanation. American Anthropologist 76:
   818-823.

Malinowski, B.
 1922 Argonauts of the Western Pacific. London:
   Routledge.

Marcus, G. and M. Fischer
 1986 Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An
   Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences.
   Chicago:University of Chicago Press.

Mead, M.
 [1928] Coming of Age in Samoa. New York:Mentor.
 1944

 [1930] Growing up in New Guinea. New York:Mentor.
 1953

Morse, J.M., D.E. Young, L. Swartz, and R. MacConnell
    1987   A Cree Indian Treatment for Psoriasis: A
            Longitudinal Study. Culture 7(2):31-41.

Morse, J.M., R. McConnell and D.E. Young
    1988   Documenting the Practice of a Traditional
            Healer: Methodological Problems and Issues.
            In Health Care Issues in the Canadian North.
            D.E. Young (ed.). Occasional Publication
            No. 26. Edmonton:Boreal Institute for Northern
            Studies:76-87.

Rabiinow, P.
    1977   Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco.
            Berkeley:University of California Press.

Rabinow, P. and W. Sullivans (eds.)
    1979   Interpretive Social Science. Berkeley:
            University of California Press.

Radcliffe-Brown, A.R.
    [1922]   The Andaman Islanders. New York:The Free
    1948   Press.

Shaeffer, C.E.
    1969   Blackfoot Shaking Tent. Glenbow-Alberta
            Institute. Occasional Paper No. 5.

Simmons, L.W. (ed.)
    1942   Sun Chief: The Autobiography of a Hopi
            Indian. New Haven:Yale University Press.

Sperber, D.
    1985   On Anthropological Knowledge. Cambridge:
            Cambridge University Press.

Stocking, G. (ed,)
    1983   Observers Observed: Essays on Anthropological
            Fieldwork. Madison:University of Wisconsin
            Press.

Swartz, L.
    1987   A Cree Healer in Role Transition. An
            unpublished M.A. thesis. Department of
            Anthropology₋ The University of Alberta,
            Edmonton, Alberta

Tedlock, D.
    1979   The Anological Tradition and the Emergence of
            a Dialogical Anthropology. Journal of
            Anthropological Research 35(4):387-400.

    1983   The Spoken Word and the Work of
            Interpretation. Philadelphia:University of
            Pennsylvania Press.

Van Maanen, J.
    1988   Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography.
            Chicago:University of Chicago Press.

Wallace, A.F.C.
    1952   The Modal Personality Structure of the
            Tuscarara Indians as Revealed by the Rorschach
            Test. Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin
            150. Washington, D.C.:Smithsonian Institute.

   [1961]   Culture and Personality. 2d ed. New York:
    1970   Random House.

Wallace, E.R.
    1983   Freud and Anthropology: A History and
            Reappraisal. New York:International Press.

Watson, L.C. and M. Watson-Franke
    1985   Interpreting Life Histories: An
            Anthropological Inquiry. New Brunswick:
            Rutgers University Press.

Whiting, J.W.M., and I.L. Child
    1953   Child Training and Personality: A Cross-
            Cultural Study. New Haven:Yale University
            Press.

Young, D.E. and R. Bonnichsen
  1984   Understanding Stone Tools: A Cognitive
          Approach. Peopling of the Americas. Process
          Series, vol. 1. Orono:Center for the Study of
          Early Man.

Young, D.E., J.M. Morse, L. Swartz and G. Ingram
  1988   The Psoriasis Research Project: An Overview.
          In Health Care Issues in the Canadian North.
          D.E. Young (ed.). Occasional Publication No.
          26. Edmonton:Boreal Institute for Northern
          Studies:76-87.

Young, D.E., G. Ingram and L. Swartz
  n.d.a. Cry of the Eagle: Encountering a Cree Healer
          University of Toronto Press. In press.

Young, D.E., G. Ingram and L. Swartz
  n.d.b. A Native Healer Adapts to the Modern World.
          In The Proceedings of the 7th International
          Congress Of Circumpolar Health. Umea, Sweden.
          In press.